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Research Dissertation

Creature comforts: an exploration of pet owners and their experiences of wellbeing gained through their relationships with their companion animals.

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Dissertation submitted to the University of Chester for the Degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Counselling) in part fulfilment of the Modular Programme in Clinical Counselling, October 2013.

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Abstract

The aim of this phenomenological research was to gain greater understanding of people's lived experience of their relationships with companion animals. Of particular interest were the everyday aspects of the relationship. Four participants were interviewed and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used in order to analyse the data. The findings are generally consistent with other research in the area in that they show the central role that companion animals play in the participants' lives, and the up-lifting, life-enhancing qualities they bestow. Unexpectedly, a major theme of healing and transformation emerged as each participant had come through difficult times in their lives with a sense that their companion animal relationship had been restorative, sustaining and motivating. An additional interest was to discover if people felt inhibited in speaking about the depth of the bond; such a finding could be a useful factor for counsellors to consider when working with clients. However, with the small, purposive sample used in this study, it was not possible to explore this aspect. It might be fruitful to continue research in this area. The study confirms that, for counsellors, an appreciation of the important contribution of pets to happiness and wellbeing could add a significant dimension to understanding a client's world. It is suggested that the human-animal bond merits attention in counselling training, research and practice.

Declaration

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Signed:
Jennifer Jane Johnson

Date:

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my research supervisor, Dr Valda Swinton, for her generous support and understanding. I am indebted to my participants, Ann, Charlotte, Louise, Violet and my pilot interviewee, for giving so much of their time and enthusiasm. I also owe much to the kind support of friends and relatives, particularly Jessica Johnson, Lucy Johnston and Arthur O'Brien. I thank Kezie, my deceased Tibetan spaniel, as she was the happy inspiration for this study; and lastly, my puppy Carlos, who took me for cheering walks during the entire process.

Abbreviations

AAI	Animal Assisted Interventions
AAT	Animal Assisted Therapy
BACP	The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
EFT	Equine Facilitated Therapy
FEDIAF	The European Pet Food Industry Federation
HAB	Human-Animal Bond
HAI	Human-Animal Interaction
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
UPR	Unconditional Positive Regard

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1.0 Chapter One – Introduction

Within this small-scale research project my aim is to investigate the significance for people of their experiences of relating to a companion animal. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the human-animal relationship enhances wellbeing. I came to the topic by a roundabout route. Having spent time exploring my fractured childhood attachments, I was drawn towards researching the effects of the early boarding school experience during people's lifespan. However, the sadness associated with my own personal experience of boarding school became not only a disincentive, but also an encouragement to look in the opposite direction, towards happiness. I pondered what it was that made me happy on a daily basis. One intriguing answer came in a fur coat. I noticed that after the daily miserable commute to work, I could simply imagine my dog and my gloom lifted. Unexpectedly I would actually smile, lending physical proof that my dog was improving my mood from forty miles away. I tried substituting thoughts of human loved-ones but nothing else worked consistently well in effecting the positive change. Thoughts of human loved-ones soon inspired complex concerns, whereas thinking about my dog was uncomplicated and instantly cheering. The feelings of peace and calm impressed me. Low mood, stress, anxiety and depression affect many of the callers to Samaritans where I volunteer, as well as the clients I work with in a medical centre as a person centred counsellor in training. Factors in people's lives that might provide a buffer or relief to distress are worthwhile investigating. Hence the research question which I am addressing in this study is:

How does the relationship with companion animals contribute to people's wellbeing?

By “wellbeing” I mean happiness, contentment and mental good health. Although I prefer the term “companion animal” to the term “pet”, which *‘is often associated with the animal being seen as simply an object or a possession’* (Society for Companion Animal Studies, 2013a), for reasons of clarity and variety I will use both terms in this study.

It is the *‘everyday experience’* that particularly interests me, the taken-for-granted aspects of the relationship that people have with their companion animals. McLeod (2011) tells us that, *‘Qualitative research represents a form of narrative knowing, grounded in everyday experience, that has the potential to make a significant and necessary contribution to the evidence base for counselling and psychotherapy’* (p.15). Through my study I am seeking to bring into awareness the emotional gifts people receive through their connection with an animal. It is the unique essence of these relationships that I wish to capture.

Our relationship with domestic animals dates back to early hunting communities 500,000 years ago. In later human history there is evidence of companion animal ownership in ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Chinese civilisations (Bradshaw 2011, 2013; Robinson 1995; Serpell, 1998). The human-animal relationship is embedded in our cultural, social and historical context. From childhood our stories are filled with animal figures in a multitude of forms. The world’s cultures, both past and present, feature animals as status symbols and helpers as well as companions, (Franklin, 1999; Podberscek, Paul & Serpell, 2000). Our capacity to interact effectively with dogs and horses in particular, allows us to employ them in an impressive number of areas, such as rescue, military, policing, sport, entertainment, scientific research, child development, medical therapies and support for people with disabilities (Robinson, 1995). These working roles often coexist with the companion role, however companionship is the most common reason for pet ownership in

western societies with almost a third of UK households owning a dog or a cat (FEDIAF, 2012). The companion bond has been shown to provide significant benefits both medically and socially (Society for Companion Animal Studies, 2013b). Pet ownership in British contemporary society has become widely accepted as beneficial:

While in the 1960s close relationship with a pet was widely considered dissocial and the cause for some concern, in the 1990s the development of very close, human styled relationships with animals is normative and, indeed, therapeutic (Franklin, 1999, p.5).

With such rapid changes in attitude within our society (Bradshaw, 2011, 2013; Fogle, 1983; Serpell, 1998), counsellors might fail to consider the significance of the human-animal bond for their clients (Noonan, 2008; Owen, 2008; Sable, 2013; Walsh, 2009a; Wells, 2011; Vining, 2003). Cooper (2008) tells us that *'research findings can be like good friends: something that can encourage, advise, stimulate and help us, but also something that we are not afraid to challenge and argue against'* (p.1). With this message in mind, I hope that my study contributes to the research conversation.

The basic premise of the research might seem obvious. However, McLeod (2011) emphasises that *"even in the most discovery-oriented qualitative studies, findings will not be plausible unless they are to some degree "obvious", in affirming at least some aspect of taken-for-granted everyday reality"* (p.13). It is clearly true that some people's wellbeing can be enhanced through their relationship with a companion animal, (Society for Companion Animal Studies, 2013b). Yet I anticipate that looking in depth at individual experiences will provide a source of rich material. Because my small-scale study focuses on the ordinary, everyday experience of people, I have chosen a phenomenological approach (Silverman, 2010) using qualitative methods (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

I am aware that I come to the topic with particular biases and I will persevere to bracket these off during the process (Willig, 2008; Denscombe, 2010). Firstly, my own experience leads me to believe that there is a unique joy to be found in the relationship between human and animal, and that it can confer wellbeing. Secondly, as a dog owner, I want to give unbiased attention to other companion animals within my study. Thirdly, I believe that some people are inclined to underestimate the importance of the relationship, at least when expressing themselves to others. As counsellors we work with clients to explore how they experience the world, naturally focusing on human relationships both past and present. I want to explore my suspicion that within the counselling relationship clients might minimise or even ignore animal relationships that can be powerful and rich. This minimising might happen through a natural inclination to filter out these bonds because they involve non-humans and therefore may seem trivial, or perhaps because people feel inhibited about discussing their importance.

I will try to make no assumptions about my findings so that I can approach the data with an open curiosity. As Etherington tells us:

If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us ... then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research (2004, p.32).

Whatever the outcome of the study, I believe it could be of interest to counsellors to appreciate from the lived experience of individuals the significance of their relationships with companion animals.

2.0 Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Not so long ago, the idea of studying social relationships between humans and other animals would have been regarded as tantamount to heresy. In Europe, until the early modern period, animals were viewed as irrational beings placed on earth solely for the economic benefit of mankind, and most scholars would have insisted that affectionate relationships between people and animals were not only distasteful but depraved. Happily those days are now gone (Pobderscek et al., 2000).

It was the mid-twentieth century when ‘those days’ began to recede because the benefits for people from their relationships with companion animals captured the interest of academics. Leading the way were veterinary scientists, joined by scholars from medicine, psychology, sociology, anthropology, zoology, philosophy, economics, ecology, education, art and literature. Indeed there is now a growing area of study, anthrozoology, which combines a number of these disciplines in order to focus on the study of the human-animal interactions (HAI) and the human-animal bond (HAB). In order to look at the existing research I have conducted searches using relevant keywords (Appendix 1, p.60) in a number of databases, including PsychINFO, EthOS, SocINDEX, Medline and Cochrane Library (Appendix 2, p.61). Before focusing on the current research most relevant to my study, it is valuable to consider the historical context.

2.2 Historical context

It is not until the late twentieth century that research into the benefits of the human-animal relationship proliferated. However, the idea that we benefit from keeping pets is not entirely new in British culture (Franklin, 1999). William Turk, an eighteenth century Quaker philanthropist, observed that the severe mental disorders of patients were relieved when the courtyards of the York Retreat asylum he ran were stocked with small domestic animal, as well as seagulls and hawks (Franklin, 1999; Robinson, 1995; Wells, 2011). In English asylums this therapeutic use of animals continued throughout the 19th century in order to provide a '*less hostile, and more attractive, environment*' (Wells, 2011, p.172). Animals were also valued for their effects on physical health, indeed in the late 19th century Florence Nightingale was struck by the pleasure long-term patients gained from the presence of a bird (Wells, 2011).

The most notable pioneer of ethology¹ was Konrad Lorenz (2002), whose book *Man Meets Dog* was first published in German in 1949, and translated into English in 1954. The English translation is still selling well, even though many of these scientific theories have been superseded. It is valued for what Lorenz tells of the human-animal bond that he explores through the stories that people tell him about their companion animals. In hearing the owners' stories he also learns about the owners themselves, thus leading the way for those of us who have an interest in the deep emotional significance of the companion animal relationship (Bradshaw, 2011; Noonan, 2008).

¹ **Ethology** is a sub-topic of zoology, which focuses on the objective study of animal behaviour under natural conditions.

The psychotherapist Boris Levenson, in the nineteen-sixties, was an important early influence in the field of animal assisted therapies (AAT), focusing his research on children's psychological development and wellbeing (Levenson, 1969; Franklin, 1999, Vining, 2003; Beck & Katcher, 2003; Hines, 2003; Walsh, 2009a, 2002b; Favali & Milton, 2010). Others followed, researching the effects of AAT and Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) with various groups, such as the elderly, (Cusack & Smith, 1984), children (Blue, 1986) those with mental health problems (Corson & Corson, 1980; Cusack, 1988) and heart patients (Friedman et al., 1980).

Significant research into what is truly happening that is beneficial for humans in companion animal relationships begins much later when veterinary science, in particular, attends to the human-animal bond. Hines (2003) gives a detailed historical account of how the term human-animal bond (HAB) developed in the 1970's growing firstly from veterinary research and attracting the attention of other professions across the world through conferences and publications. In tracing the growth of HAB, the multi-disciplinary, multi-national interest is apparent (Table 1, Appendix 3, p.62).

The veterinarian Bruce Fogle, took a positive view of the therapeutic effects of pet ownership (Fogle, 1981, 1983) with far-reaching influence, (Serpell, 1998, 1995; Hines, 2003). Notable others draw together work within the field, such as Katcher & Beck (1983), Anderson et al., (1984) and Rowan (1988). From these, and similar studies, the concepts of the human-animal bond and its positive manifestations have spread to such an extent that it is not possible to explore more than a limited number here. I have chosen to consider the most prominent recent work from several different disciplines, not only for its content concerning the human-animal relationship, but also because of what the studies say about the value and short-

comings of different methodologies within the research. Finally, I have considered the place of my study within the literature.

2.3 Current studies

The literature most relevant to my study, published over the last twenty years, falls broadly into three strands: i) those devoted to the **therapeutic effects** of the human-animal relationship; ii) those focused on the **emotional and development aspects** of pet ownership; and iii) those which explore **theories** concerning human-animal bond within our culture.

i) Therapeutic effects

A great number of peer reviewed papers and books explore the therapeutic aspects of the relationship between humans and companion animals. The findings have influenced the development of AAT and AAI of many types. Odendaal (2002) used a scientific approach to exploring the benefits to people's mental health in his study of how human-dog interactions affect blood pressure and neurochemical changes which promote healing. An important outcome of Peacock et al.'s (2012) study of the connection between human-animal bonds and mental health is to open up the discussion about the implications for mental health services. However, the results of these studies do not always supports the expected beneficial outcomes for the target group. For example, when Phelps et al. (2008) investigated the effects of dogs' visits on depression, mood, and social interaction in elderly individuals living in a nursing home, they found that their empirical methodology proved inadequate. Although the residents said that they enjoyed the visits, the baseline assessment methods used in the study did not show sufficient evidence of beneficial effect without further research. However, Chur-Hansen et al. (2009) collected both quantitative and qualitative data for their study of companion animals and the impact they have on

elderly women's physical and psychological health. They find that the data give them enough evidence to support a finding that women with moderate attachment to their pets, experienced benefits which exceeded those experienced by women with low or high attachments. It seems qualitative research has an important role to play in the field of health based HAB and HAI research. The relevance to my study of the human-animal bond in everyday domestic settings is that these studies support the theory that wellbeing accrues from the relationship. Such studies also colour modern thinking within our culture and thus influence attitudes to pet keeping and the companion animal relationship (Franklin, 1999; Podberscek et al., 2000).

It is also of interest to note the mixture of research methods used to make discoveries in the area, from the quantitative (Siegel, 1990; Staats, S., Sears & Pierfelice, 2006) to mixed methodologies (Blue, 1986; Wood et al., 2007; Chur-Hansen, Winefield, & Beckwith, 2009; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Cavanaugh, Leonard, & Scammon, 2008) and purely qualitative, such as Noonan (2008), Favali and Milton (2010) and Irvine (2012). Indeed, Favali and Milton (2010) use IPA to analyse the experiences of five disabled adults experience of horse-riding. Their findings highlight the benefits to the participants' *'issues of trust, assertiveness and self-esteem'* (p.261). One of the reasons they chose a phenomenological approach for their study is that *'there is very little evidence of what people are actually experiencing when they are with animals'* (p.252). Gilbey, McNicholas and Collis (2007) draw attention to the deficiency in quantitative methods within the field of HAB research in their study of the impact of companion animal ownership on loneliness. Unable to find evidence that loneliness is reduced in their sample, they suggest that their methods are restrictive in that they *'fail to detect the qualitative changes that truly do occur'* (p.352).

ii) Emotional and developmental aspects

The areas of attachment, bereavement, child development and personal experiences of AAT find much attention. Influential studies include those of Noonan (2008), Robinson (1998), Beck & Katcher (1996), Stewart, et al., (1989) and Blue (1986). In addition, there are studies relating to the nature of dogs and cats, (Bradshaw, 2011, 2013), and current studies on canine capacity for empathic response to humans (Coren, 2012; Custance & Mayers, 2012).

Blue (1986) looks in detail at the child-pet relationship in the development of attachment and a range of developmental skills both physical and psychological in children. Her findings prompt her recommendations that the educational curriculum for young children should provide animal-related activities. Beck & Katcher (1996) consolidate a wealth of material re-enforcing their work on the emotional benefits of companion animal relationships. Stewart et al. (1989) focus on the complex nature of the loss of a companion animals and suggest that those in the caring professions, who are in contact with bereaved pet owners, should be *'particularly sensitive to the warning signs of depression, complicated bereavement, anxiety or panic states, suicidal thoughts and other affective disorders'* (p.157).

Noonan's study, *People and Pets* (2008), is of direct relevance to counsellors and psychotherapists. Herself a clinical psychologist and counsellor, she explores the significance of pets to their owners, drawing on *'psychoanalytical and attachment theory, ethology, veterinarians and literature'* (p.395) as well as her own personal experience of lingering grief after the death of her cat (p.395). Unlike the majority of academics who study the human-animal bond, she confines her research to *'the everyday domestic tie between people and their pets'* (p.395), a perspective which matches that of my own study. Banning (2012), a counsellor with a particular interest in promoting wellbeing in the workplace, experiences for herself the way in which

horses facilitate therapy. She learns, through equine facilitated therapy (EFT), that *'if we listen, horses can teach us much about how we relate to the world and how we're experienced by others'* (p.18).

iii) Theories

There is also research that illuminates the theoretical landscape in which my topic is situated. Beck & Katcher's work *'Future Directions in Human-Animal Bond Research'* (2003) addresses the two guiding theoretical influences on HAB research, namely biophilia hypothesis² and social support theory³. They argue that it is *'difficult to separate out biophilia, the cultural response to animals of different kinds ... and the effects of social support on both animals and humans.'* And that both approaches need to be combined in order to avoid too *'narrow a focus on companion animals as the sole source of health benefits from the nonhuman environment.'* (p.81). In simple terms, researchers should consider the impact of factors such as, the garden, countryside and birds when making claims that, for example, dog walking brings psychological benefits to people.

Bradshaw (2011, 2013), in his anthrozoological studies of dogs and cats in human society, gives us new insights into their natures in order to promote a greater understanding of their roles as companion animals. While acknowledging the importance of the emotional bond, he is critical of people who attribute human characteristics to their dogs:

Without an emotional bond, there would be no pets – and yet this bond can sometimes create problems for dogs and humans alike. The emotional bond

² **Biophilia hypothesis** is the theory that there is an instinctive bond between people and other living organisms.

³ **Social support theory** is defined as “an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient” (Shumaker & Brownell 1984, p.11).

between owner and the pet is often, perhaps to some degree always, bound up in anthropomorphic projections (2011 p.149).

In addition, he counters some of the present theories about the human-dog and human-cat relationships and raises serious concerns about how the animals will fare as society changes. The sociologist Adrian Franklin (1999) disagrees with Bradshaw's fear about the dangers of increasing anthropomorphism. Indeed, he sees anthropomorphism as widening the gap between humans and animals, the reverse of what he believes is occurring in modern society. He argues that as we grow to value animals as both therapeutic, and of ecological quintessence, the dangers of anthropomorphism are diminishing. His study examines changes in the British, Australian and North American social and cultural environments, and how the changes have impacted upon the ways we relate to animals and the natural world. When he considers the accumulated science concerning the health benefits of pet ownership, AAT and pet-facilitated therapy (PFT), he speculates that *'it may prove difficult to ignore their potential savings to burgeoning national health budgets'* (p.103). His positive views are compelling because they take into account both the scientific advances and the nature of our unique connection to animals.

Serpell's perspective differs from Franklin's. He sees advantages in anthropomorphism believing that,

Anthropomorphism has provided the opportunity to use animals as an alternative source of social support and the means to benefit emotionally and physically from this (2002, p.448).

These differing opinions on the values and dangers of attributing human feelings and motivations to animals each deserve consideration when hearing people's personal experiences.

Podberscek et al.'s (2000) book, *Companion Animals and Us*, brings together several important studies concerning the nature of the human-companion animal relationship. The book extends into an area which has been little researched: how pet ownership is influenced by other current human relationships which might exist for the owners, and how pet ownership impacts on networks of family relationship, both important considerations for counsellors (Walsh, 2009b). Kobak (2009) seeks to define and measure the attachment bond comparing it to the adult human attachment bond and finding it has strong similarities.

In *Pack of Two*, Knapp (1998) explores what lies behind the human-animal bond. She reaches into the historical evidence and the current developments in animal therapy, through her own personal experiences with dogs. Arguably the most influential study of human-animal relationships is Serpell's (1998) *In the Company of Animals*, first published in 1986, when studies in the field were first emerging, and since revised. He challenges us to explore the relationships more closely, both animal and human because,

Pet-owners do not value their animals primarily as objects, but rather as subjects; as distinctive personalities with whom they have affectionate relationships not dissimilar to the kinds of affectionate relationships they have with close friends and relatives. If we wish to understand the possible contribution of pets to human health and welfare, then surely we should begin by exploring the influence of close relationships, in general, on our mental and physical condition (p.106-7).

2.4 Conclusion

While the human-animal relationship attracts attention widely across disciplines, it is nevertheless challenging to identify studies which truly focus on the everyday

experience of pet owners. The ideas and directions within the material undoubtedly penetrate current attitudes surrounding pet ownership, however, it is striking that few studies look in depth at the everyday experience of people sharing their homes, families, resources and time with pets. When Walsh (2009a) reviews the literature she finds that *'the field of mental health has been slow to recognize the importance of these bonds in clinical theory, research and practice'* (p.462-3). Walsh discovers that *'attachments with companion animals have been undervalued and even pathologized in the field of mental health'* (p.462). The psychologist and psychotherapist Owen (2008) reflects that the relationship that a client has with an animal is a significant part of the wider context of their lives and thus deserves the attention of counsellors: *'Consideration of a client's relationship with the animal world in isolation would seem limiting, but the exploration of this in relation to the overall context of their life seems to add an extra dimension of understanding'* (p.47). My study aims to contribute to this *'extra dimension'* through its focus on the everyday, domestic, non-deliberately therapeutic relationship which people have with their animals.

3.0 Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Research philosophy and design

The previous chapter reviews a number of valuable studies which use quantitative methods to establish the impact of companion animals on different groups of people, such as children, the elderly, post-operative heart patients, and people with disabilities (Friedman et al., 1980; Siegal 1990; Gilbey et al., 2007). These studies involve large sample groups and statistical data; their underpinning perspective is positivism, which favours traditional quantitative methods. My small-scale study focuses on the everyday experience of people, therefore a phenomenological approach is appropriate (Silverman, 2010).

Qualitative phenomenological research has developed in order to understand phenomena through the close analysis of people's words and behaviour (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It was developed in the mid-1990s from the traditions of phenomenology combined with hermeneutics. The philosophy of phenomenology grew from the work of the philosopher and mathematician Husserl in the early 20th century. Husserl moved away from positivism, which holds that knowledge is acquired only through a logical, mathematical treatment of data and rejects interpretive, intuitive routes to knowledge. He believed that the essence of phenomena could be understood through an examination of the essential qualities of experiences in isolation from their contexts (Smith et al., 2009). The philosophy of hermeneutics, on the other hand, espouses the interpretation of experience within a context. This approach has its history in the interpretation of texts, principally religious ones (Smith et al., 2009). In the mid-20th century the philosopher Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009), developed an approach which merged these two seemingly contradictory standpoints. Pure phenomenology seeks to set aside any

preconceptions about what is being studied, as if the phenomenon exists in a vacuum, unaffected by the researcher's beliefs and experiences. In contrast, in hermeneutics, the researcher is always interpreting and taking account of pre-knowledge and all relevant contexts. Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009) perceived that it is never entirely possible to suspend our own preconceptions, thus interpretation naturally coexists with our attempt to bracket off our preconceptions. McLeod (2001) regards the '*fusion*' of '*both phenomenology and hermeneutic sensibilities [as] necessary complements of any attempts to study the dynamics of everyday life*' (p.62). Through a synthesis of phenomenology and hermeneutics the researcher is free to interpret experience while accepting that their own experience has implications for the research and must be acknowledge and understood, and then bracketed off as far as possible, throughout the process (Willig, 2008; Denscombe, 2010).

I have chosen a phenomenological data analysis method, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), (Maykut & Morehouse 1994; Silverman, 2010; Denscombe, 2010). As McLeod (2011) explains, IPA is exploratory and descriptive, with the aim of illuminating what seemingly ordinary things mean to people: '*normal, routine facets of the everyday world around us but, from the phenomenological perspective, this does not make them trivial or inconsequential*' (Denscombe, 2010, p.95). The small scale of my study means that I cannot expect to generalise from my findings. A grounded theory approach would allow for the examination of the hypothesis of this study concerning wellbeing and the companion animal relationship, however, the number of participants required and the overall size of the study makes the method unsuitable (McLeod 2011). While attracted to a heuristic approach, focusing on my own '*self-discovery*' (Moustakas, 1990), I have chosen to concentrate on the experience of others and the rich source of material they provide.

3.2 Sample

It is important in an IPA study to collect data from a small and reasonably homogeneous sample. This enables the researcher to identify similarities and differences from a sample that represents a perspective rather than a population, (Smith et al., 2009). In quantitative research, where a universal generalisation is the aim of the research, a large representative sample is needed (Denscombe, 2010) and probability sampling is the norm in order to shed light on the experiences of a whole population. For this IPA study, the sample needed to be selected purposively in order to include only those participants who could provide insights into the experience of relating to a companion animal: *'The focus is not on obtaining 'universal truths' but on achieving a deeper understanding of the meaning of experience from the perspective of the participants selected for the study'* (Mintz, 2010). Potential participants needed to understand the specific focus of the research, hence the information provided for them gave clear details of the intended study (Appendix 4, p.63). They also needed to respond to the topic, and to this end, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were made transparent (Denscombe, 2010).

The following inclusion criteria were applied when selecting the sample:

- People who had experienced a meaningful, significant relationship with a companion animal for a period in their lives.
- For ethical reasons, people who had sufficient emotional support in the event of the interview bringing up troubling material for them.

The exclusion criteria for the sample were as follows:

- Again for ethical reason, people with whom I had a dual relationship, such as friendship or working relationship.

- Those who work with animals professionally such as farmers, zookeepers, animal welfare workers, zoologists, AAT or AAI specialists.

As I work as a Samaritan volunteer listener, I felt that the Samaritan organisation could provide accessible and suitable participants. In preparation for the research, I conducted a pilot interview with a Samaritan volunteer. Although I intended to advertise for my participants, this proved unnecessary as, my pilot interviewee referenced my first participant to me. The process of referencing continued, and thus I acquired a snowball sample (Denscombe, 2010; Maykut & Moorehouse, 1994) consisting of two Samaritan volunteers and two counsellors in training, each of whom met the inclusion criteria.

3.3 Data Collection

Bearing in mind that, *'Good research interviewing requires us to accept, and indeed relish, the fact that the course of an interview cannot be laid down in advance.'* (Smith et al., 2009, p.65), semi-structured interviews were planned. This method provides flexibility to explore the topic at depth with individuals whose experiences vary widely, and yet obtain data that adheres closely to the research question. Taking account of learning from the pilot interview, a series of questions and prompts were developed (Appendix 5, p.65) to encourage the participants to talk at length and in depth about their experiences (Smith et al. 2009). After gaining their informed consent (Appendix 6, p.66) interviews of forty minutes to one hour in length were conducted with each participant. I allowed each interview to develop in response to the phenomenology of the individual, endeavouring to engage empathetically and enter into their unique frame of reference (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Willig reminds us that *'In qualitative research, the objective of data collection is to create a comprehensive record of participants' words and actions. This means making sure that as little as possible is lost in translation'* (2008, p.16). To this end, digital recordings of interviews were made and transcribed verbatim, paying attention to pauses and emotions, such as laughter and tears. Each participant was encouraged to check their transcribed interview to ensure its accuracy and authenticity, thus contributing to the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

The IPA method of data analysis follows a series of stages which the researcher must follow in principle, although the techniques used are adaptable according to preference (Denscombe, 2010; Smith et al, 2009; Willig, 2008). The flowchart in the Appendix (Appendix 7, Table 2, p.67) sets out the stages of the analysis. The method allows themes to emerge directly from the participants' words, rather than using the data to confirm pre-set hypotheses or categories, (Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994). The major themes that emerge give a framework that enables a distillation of the findings (Smith et al, 2009).

After careful, verbatim transcription of each interview, the first stage was emersion in each transcript independently of the others, reading and re-reading, *'indwelling'* the material, engaging the qualities of empathy and reflectivity (Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994). Remaining aware of my preconceptions and biases and bracketing them off, was vital in order to capture the essence of the participants' words (Willig, 2008; Denscombe, 2010). At this stage, exploratory notes were made taking account of the language, the descriptive narrative, and concepts expressed. These were recorded in the right-hand margin of the transcripts. In the left-hand margin initial ideas about

the emerging themes were noted (Appendix 8, Table 3, p.68). The second stage began with listing chronologically the emergent themes for each participant. At this stage, researchers using IPA, must find a suitable method to connect the data. Often this part of the process involves hard copy which is cut into sections and re-arranged in order to illustrate the connections visually (Smith et al., 2009). For me, this stage entailed using the computer software tools to colour-code the emergent themes across the chronological data. The resultant coding revealed matches and links (Appendix 9, Table 4, p.69-72). The third stages involved grouping the coded material (Appendix 10, Table 5, p.73-78) and developing the emergent themes into cluster themes with supporting verbatim material for each participant (Appendices 11.1; 11.2; 11.3; 11.4, Tables 6-9, p.79-99). At this stage new themes emerged as the data for each participant was explored, and re-explored, as can be seen in my research journal (Appendix 13, p.105). Finally, I distilled the essence (Smith et al., 2009) into major themes⁴ and sub-themes (Appendix 12, Table 10, p.100-104) attempting to capture *'the quality and texture of individual experience'* (Willig, 2008. p.57).

3.5 Validity and trustworthiness

It is problematic to assess validity and trustworthiness in IPA research using guidelines traditionally used for assessing quantitative research (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009, p.179) cite Yardley (2000, 2008) as providing criteria which are both accessible and suitable for qualitative studies. She recommends four broad

⁴ I use the term "major theme" in preference to *'master theme'* (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2008), because it is more gender neutral.

principles: ‘*sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence*’; and ‘*impact and importance*’. Considering each of these at all stages of the research gives a comprehensive approach to validity. To clarify what each principle means for my research, I have summarised as follow:

The Three Principles	Aspects for attention
Sensitivity to context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social and cultural context of the study • The existing literature • The material from participants
Commitment and rigour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to the care and comfort of the participants • Understanding and application of interview skills • Care selecting sample • Close attention to the data
Transparency and coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a detailed audit trail of the process • Consideration of the audience when writing up the study • Adherence to the principles of IPA
Impact and importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling the reader something interesting, important or useful.

Table 11: Three guiding principles of validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research, (from Yardley, 2000, as cited in Smith et al., 2009).

3.6 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations permeate all aspects of the research process, from the formulation of the research question through to dissemination of the findings.

(Mintz, 2010)

In order to consider ethical issues throughout the research process, the guidelines and standards within the BACP (2013) Ethical Framework for Good Practice in

Counselling and Psychotherapy and the University of Chester (2012) Research Governance Handbook, have been a constant steer. The formulation of the research question was discussed with tutors and colleagues in order to consider the ethical implications before the proposal was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Chester for approval. At each stage of the process supervision, and the written guidance, were used in order to safeguard participants and ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

Because unforeseen ethical issues can arise during the process the following safeguards were put in place where risks could be anticipated:

Potential Risks	Safeguards
Potential participants might feel obliged to come forward for the study because they know the researcher.	The sample were people not known to the researcher prior to the study.
Participants might not fully understand the nature of the study or the call on their time.	The information sheet was comprehensive, including details of the nature of the study and the type and length of the interview (Appendix 4, p.63).
The participants might be concerned about their anonymity throughout the process and after the study is complete.	The nature and limitations of confidentiality were fully explained. Informed consent was gained before commencing interviews. (Appendix 6, p.66). Pseudonyms were used within the transcripts and study to protect people's identities. All data were kept securely and password-protected where appropriate. Participants were assured that audio-recordings and other material would be destroyed after the study's completion and assessment.

The participants might be concerned about their autonomy during the process.	An equal power balance with participants was established, as far as possible (Etherington, 2004). Each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview, which they were invited to amend if they wished. It was made clear that participants could withdraw from the process at any stage before its completion.
The interviews might touch on sensitive areas and leave the participants in need of support.	Participants were debriefed after the interview. It was ensured that they had accessible, sufficient independent emotional support.
Difficulties could arise if the research environment was unsuitable for uninterrupted, confidential interviews.	The interviews were conducted in quiet, private rooms with the advanced approval of each participant.

Table 12: Ethical Issues: Potential risk and safeguard for participants.

Potential harm to participants

Although the study highlights the positive aspects of the companion animal relationship, given the expected close nature of the bond it was considered likely that the participants would touch on loss and other painful memories. I was open about these concerns with the participants and we agreed to end the interview should we feel it necessary. Whilst aware that I was in the role of researcher, and not counsellor during the semi-structured interviews (Smith, 2008), I tried to remain person-centred offering the core condition of empathy (Rogers, 1980), thus ensuring that I was attuned to signs of distress.

Potential benefits to participants

The focus of the study is an area of the participants' lives that they value and enjoy. However, the companion animal relationship is not a topic that is generally dwelt on

in daily conversation. Each of the participants expressed enthusiasm about contributing to the study and spoke afterwards of valuing the opportunity to have their experiences heard at length and in depth (Smith et al., 2009).

3.7 Limitations

There are constraints and limitations that affect the research. It is a small-scale study thus limiting the data to that collected from four individuals. From such a small, homogeneous sample, it is not possible to arrive at generalisations (Denscombe, 2010). Further, phenomenological analysis relies on the interpretation of the participants' use of language (Willig, 2008). Indeed, it can be argued that the complexity of language itself, as used by participants, is beyond the analytical scope of the IPA method. Language constrains, shapes or prescribes meaning (Willig 2008), hence, McLeod (2011) cautions researchers to take a tentative approach to drawing conclusions from the data. Spinelli (2005) speaks of phenomenological research as *'exhaustive, time-consuming, fraught with interpretative dangers, and never complete'* (p.137), and these features certainly impact upon this study. However, he also highlights the *'depth of value and meaning to all participants that traditional research never begins to reach'* (ibid); a balance of difficulty and reward that I have embraced, and can therefore set out my findings in the following chapter.

4.0 Chapter Four – Findings

4.1: Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings that emerge through the IPA process described in Chapter Three. Although the participants each have their distinct characteristics, it has been possible to identify three major themes linking the data from each interview. The major themes have within them sub-themes that assist in capturing particular facets, qualities and details of the participants' experience:

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
1: Presence: The everyday experience of wholeness within the home, and sensory pleasures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Filling the spaces• Touch, sight, sound and play
2: The Bond: The experience of sharing, caring and understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A constant witness• Extraordinary companionship• Understanding, reciprocity and caring
3: Self and Enrichment: The therapeutic experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healing and transformation• Connections and purpose

Table 13: Major Themes and Sub-Themes

As will be seen, some sub-themes expose greater depths in the experiences of particular participants. Some of the verbatim interview extracts, which illustrate the findings, have been edited for clarity. Each appears in italics with reference codes identifying its page and section within the original interview transcripts.

The participants selected their pseudonyms for the study; however, they each preferred that their animals' names remain unchanged. There follows brief relevant details of each:

	Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Age	Mid twenties	Early forties	Early forties	Early forties
Number of humans in household	Three: Anne, partner and sister	Two: Violet and daughter	Two: Louise and partner	One: Charlotte
Companion animal(s)	Two cats	Two cats	One dog	One horse, one foal, one dog, six cats
Profile	Samaritan volunteer	Samaritan volunteer	Counsellor in training	Counsellor in training

Table 14: Profiles of participants

4.2: Major Theme 1 – Presence: the everyday experience of wholeness within the home, and sensory pleasures.

Sub-Themes:

- **Filling the spaces**
- **Touch, sight, sound and play**

Violet says, *'I don't think a house is a home without an affectionate pet in it'* (V4/4): the other participants, in their differing ways, echo her view. By filling the space with their physical presence, each of the animals provides stimuli to the senses that delight the participants.

- **Sub-theme: Filling the spaces**

For Violet the presence of her two young cats is intensely important. She had experienced a period without cats owing to an allergy she developed. The allergy eventually disappeared and she introduced her present cats into the household. During the period without cats '*the house was missing a wholeness*' (V11/17) that she felt acutely when her young daughter spent time away. She struggles to find words to express the power of her feelings:

*Going home to an empty house is just the most **awful** thing – I can't express – just, no, no other life in the house, no other being in the house – it just feels empty. (V15/25)*

Louise echoes the emptiness and emphasises that her dog's constant presence is hugely important and central to the space:

I feel her presence... there's a constant kind of sense of her there ... it's not that life revolves around, well maybe it does (laughs) revolve around her, but I think her presence is very important in the house.... it's very odd, the house feels very empty without her in it. So I think she's got a very, a very positive presence. (L6-7/12)

Louise experiences her dog, Joy, as filling not only the physical space of the house, but also an emotional space. It is an experience which is beyond her expectations:

So I think that, how important she is really, and how, she does fill spaces physically but also emotionally. And that has been quite surprising. (L13/23)

For Anne her two cats' continual presence is important to her because she says '*I didn't feel quite as alone*' (A4/8). She speaks with pleasure of their pervasiveness, '*They're just usually there*' (A6/10). One cat in particular:

she's on my knee almost before I've managed to sit on the sofa, and she sleeps next to me in bed on the mattress and she's very much always there.

(A1/1)

Charlotte identifies her significant companion animal as her horse, Amber. Although they do not share a living space, Charlotte speaks of a time before having Amber when *'it was very lonely'* (C7/26). She credits Amber with filling the lonely void. She also speculates that her house *'would feel empty'* (C19/60) without her dog and cats, which is not something she wants to experience.

- **Sub-theme: Touch, sight and play**

The consistent pleasure, both through the physical affection and humorous antics, is striking in Charlotte's account. Her six cats (Tom, Tabatha, Tennyson, Travis and Tilly) constantly entertain as *'they all have their own characters and they all do their own little thing'* (C19/59). Moreover, they shower her with daily gifts:

there's always something that one them will bring to me each day, in terms of affection, or something that they do that can make me laugh.' (C18/57)

Violet returns several times to the visual pleasure her two cats (Lilith and Itse) bring. In her description she uses a striking metaphor expressing her admiration for their strength and beauty: *'They are like panthers, absolutely just gorgeous and sleek and beautiful'* (V3/2). She speaks of their energy, personalities and of missing *'the contact ... the cuddling and playing'* (V10/16) if she is away from them.

Anne uses the sensory words *'nuzzle'* and *'purr'* on four occasions to tell of the pleasure of touching and hearing her cats (Pepper and Kia). She admits, hesitantly, that their appearance triggers her maternal instinct:

this is going to sound really weird – I think they are very good at looking cute – I find, I look at them – I think I get the same reaction to cats that most people get to babies, ... that they do something cute and you get that sort of, warm, sort of haarrh (sighs). (A3/3)

Louise's describes her pleasure in her dog (Joy) as a delight in Joy's comic behaviour:

if she is being told to do something she doesn't want to, there's a whole kind of grumbling that goes on – and if we say get off the sofa she'll go and, instead of just sitting down she'll do this whole turning around and around and around – sometimes for ages, making it known I think that she's not happy that she's not allowed to be on the sofa. (L8/15)

Not only does Joy provide these comic mimes, but she also has a continual life-and-soul quality: '*she'll just go along with whatever's going on – as long as she's in the middle of it (laughs)*' (L9/17).

4.3: Major Theme 2 - The Bond: the experience of sharing, caring and understanding.

Sub-Themes:

- A constant witness
- Extraordinary companionship
- Understanding, reciprocity and caring

Each participant feels strongly attached to her animals. They each speak of a reciprocal caring and a sense that the animal knows them, sometimes in ways that are difficult to explain. For two participants in particular, the bond is particularly

strong because their animals have been with them through significant periods of personal change and growth.

- **Sub-theme – A constant witness**

Louise's dog, has accompanied as her only '*constant*' through the difficult journey after her marriage broke up eleven years ago:

*And that's the only thing in that time that has been constant, and I think about her that she and I have lived that **together**, even though she's obviously not experienced lots of the things that I've experienced. She's seen all of that – that's the idea of a witness – I really like that idea. Nobody else has been there through all of that, those things, and those changes (L13-14/26).*

Charlotte also feels bonded with Amber because she has been with her through great difficulty: '*the last four or five years have been like a roller coaster – and she's been like the one constant who's always been there*' (C6/21). That lasting companionship strengthened her to face the difficulties: '*it felt like it was us together and it didn't really matter what else was going on in my life*' (C7/23).

Violet expresses fierce commitment to keeping Lilith and Itse with her, '*there is just no way I could have not had those cats in my life - my best friends*' (V19/36), despite taking risks and overcoming obstacles in her rented home where animals are prohibited.

Anne laughs as she describes the ways in which Pepper and Kia follow her every move, like it or not,

They're just always, yeah, there're always there. You're trying to shoo them off if I need to get up or anything else, it's a nightmare because as soon as I move them they are trying to get back to (laughing) (A8/17).

- **Sub-theme – Extraordinary companionship**

Anne values her relationship with Pepper and Kia because she is their special human (A1/1):

I am the person they come to. They are very much my cats - even though there's other people, they will always have a preference for me over anybody else (A2/2).

Their preference for her makes their bond clan-like: *'it's almost like a little pack, like a little unit'* (A7/13).

There is also a sense of exclusiveness in Violet's strong description of her relationship with Lilith and Itse in which she reiterates *'my'* and *'mine'*:

*they are **my** cats, they are not **mine** and my partner's cats, not **mine** and my mum and dad's cats, they're **my** cats and I've raised them since they were kittens – and I think, the bond's stronger there (V18/36).*

Louise also feels that she and Joy *'have a more important bond'* (L7/14) than the dog has with anyone else. Whilst she queries the notion; nevertheless it is real to her:

although she's happy with other people – and I might be imagining this (laughs), I'm quite happy to admit that I might be imagining it – I do think there is a bond here (L7/14).

The dread she has of losing Joy indicates the strength of the attachment: *'I've been thinking, because she's getting grey and everything, how am I going to manage when she's gone'* (L12/23).

Charlotte struggles to find adequate words to express the *'really special bond'* she feels with her horse Amber: *'it's just been a really special bond that - it's kind of hard to put into words'* (C6/22), *'it's almost like we understood each other'* (C4/11). When

she says, *'she's always been where I've turned to I suppose the most for support'* (C15/49), she reveals the depth and magnitude of the relationship.

- **Sub-theme - Understanding, reciprocity and caring**

In turning to Amber for *'support'* Charlotte felt understood and nurtured. They worked through their problems in unison with each able to progress no faster than the other, and a sense that Amber was reflecting Charlotte's unresolved issues:

we hadn't worked through all her (Amber's) problems, mainly because they were probably coming from me, and I haven't worked through my own problems (C17/55).

Louise experienced *'trust'* between herself and Joy as an important reciprocal bond at a time when she felt betrayed. The memory is painful, and she hesitates before committing to the word *'trust'*:

*I could give her I guess as well, (sounding tearful) a fanciful word to use, **trust** that she had in me to care for her, and that was nice because I was very devastated. But she kind of helped me to ... put myself together again I think. She was very much part of that process of ... yeah, re-building myself I suppose (L3/6).*

I think it was hard for me to trust people, but it wasn't hard for me to trust my dog. I just trust her, she's loyal - she's there and she's not going anywhere. And she won't let me down (L14/27).

Louise receives from Joy a mirroring of the loyalty and trust she gives.

Violet feels that her cats cared in an intriguingly intuitive way when she was pregnant:

before I knew I was pregnant, they were both on my stomach, and as I got bigger they kind of draped over the bump and – they were looking after me and the baby (V5/6).

She speaks of having a *'purr or a random conversation while I make a cup of tea in the morning'* (V21/44), and of being greeted when she comes through the door (V3/2), with a powerful sense of her cats interacting and understanding her.

Similarly Anne speculates that there could be *'a protective bond'* (A2/2) with her cats. Kia, in particular *'picks up on things'* (A2/2) and she gives an example concerning her sister's panic attacks:

if she has a panic attack, she'll find a cat on her knee, which is really weird. sort of intuitive emotional – they don't necessarily understand what's going on but that pain or comfort (A5-6/10).

Her description conveys her difficulty in making sense of her experience along with a conviction that the cats have an understanding of some sort, which informs their caring behaviour.

4.4: Major Theme 3 – Self and Enrichment: the therapeutic experience.

Sub-Themes:

- **Healing and transformation**
- **Connections and purpose**

Each participant has their own story of the benefits their animals have brought to their lives. These benefits include helping to restore emotional wellbeing and

encouraging social engagement. The sense of purpose is apparent in each account, rooted in the routines and responsibilities their animals bring into their lives.

- **Sub-theme – Healing and transformation**

Louise made a conscious decision to acquire a dog while suffering the emotional pain of her marriage breakdown, and not just any dog. She says,

I thought that the best way to get some happiness back in my life was to buy a dog.... I don't know what had got into my head but what I thought I really want to buy is a cocker spaniel, and I want to call her Joy (L1/1).

She is tearful as she describes how she 'didn't feel like interacting with **people**' (L2/4). Joy shielded her from having to engage with others before she felt ready:

I didn't want to socialise so I'd be able to say at work, oh I can't come out because I've got to go home and feed the dog (laughs). I'm sure people thought I was a bit mad, but that's fine. It just gave me an excuse not to interact with people till I really wanted to on a social level – it was really useful (L4/6).

Beyond simply shielding her, Joy gave her 'optimism' and a 'focus of enjoyment' at a time when she 'might have been a lot more miserable'. Louise says, 'she really picked me up at a time when I was pretty low' (L10/8). Joy was 'something to hold onto that was good.... And it worked, yeah it worked (L15/30-31). Her dog eased her back into the world without demanding much in return:

she gave me some stability – looking after her, taking her out, routine, some sort of interaction that didn't expect anything of me except very basic kind of actions (L3/5).

Charlotte's story emphasises the transformation she experienced through her relationship with Amber, her horse.

It's hard to explain how I used to feel when I first had her – I felt I couldn't really express myself to anyone. I felt very isolated in a lot of ways. I felt I couldn't really talk to anyone in many ways. And yet when I was with her I felt that everything was alright ...Yeah, (Slowly, thoughtfully) I don't think I would be where I am – she got me through a lot ... just in terms of giving me that kind of reflection, that... horses whatever you do they give you a very honest reflection of your emotions and what you are doing – which I suppose is a bit like person centred (C15/49).

Violet too believes Pepper and Kia played a significant part in her recovery from mental ill-health:

They do lift my mood ... they've been part of my recovery really because I had – over the three years – I've had a couple of breakdowns, ended up on medication – and it wasn't until I got the kittens last year that I actually suddenly started feeling a hell of a lot better (V10/16).

Anne also speaks of a therapeutic benefit she experiences from her cats:

I've always had problems with depression, anxiety ... and I got them at a point I was feeling quite down - and I think they just – yeah, the things they do – the little quirks just made me smile. So I think having them around always made me happier (A4/2).

- **Sub-theme – Connections and purpose**

Furthermore, Anne's cats give her a reason to keep going which she recognises as valuable:

It gives me another reason, if you like, to keep going, and, to do that next day when I don't want to do that next day (A14/31).

The responsibility Anne feels for Pepper and Kia adds to their motivating effect.

we adopted them, and we adopted them to look after them for the rest of their lives, ... we have a duty to provide them with food and shelter, comfort and everything else. ... For me it gives a sense of purpose ... I have someone, something that's dependent on me (A15/33).

She uses the pronoun 'someone', revealing their person-like significance to her.

Violet too experiences her cats as motivating her to recover when she is emotionally debilitated and to keep going for their sakes:

if it hadn't have been for them I wouldn't have had a reason to not - to push myself to normalisation and sort myself out so they do have a massive effect on my mood (V11/17).

And similar to Anne, Violet surprises herself when she refers to them as if human in her description of their motivating effect:

I think my recovery was a lot quicker ... it was somebody else, 'somebody' else (tone of querying her expression 'somebody') I had to function for (V11/18).

The sense of 'huge responsibility' (C20/65) also features in Charlotte's account. Strikingly, she is clear that the way her cats' behaviour changed towards her taught her about how she related to people and animals during her troubled time:

as I gradually came out of myself I noticed the change in them, that they wanted to spend time with me and were a lot more playful, so I think they

taught me a lot about myself and how I could come across to people and to animals (C2/6).

Louise feels it was important to her that Joy helped her engage with others at a level which felt pleasurable and undemanding while she was recovering:

I could engage with other dog-walkers and I had a nice little group of people I'd meet most mornings – we'd chat about our dogs and that's all we did, we didn't go into anything else about who we were – and I found that level of engagement sufficient at that time (L10/18).

Now that she has come through the difficult period, she still derives pleasure from the social connections and appreciation which Joy brings:

People will stop you and tell you the whole story about rescuing their dog and – I like that, that sort of engagement. And I like people liking her and giving her a fuss, - at the corner shop, every time we go they give her lots of treats (L5/8).

- **Sub-theme – Identity and beliefs**

Louise is habitually open about how important her dog is in her life; her commitment to Joy is part of her identity.

*I've been **very** open about how important my dog is in helping my emotional wellbeing and my mental health at kind of key moments (L8/16).*

During the early period when she was very low, she adjusted her working hours in order to incorporate Joy into her life and reaped benefits:

I just negotiated my working hours to fit around (laughs) looking after her.

I kind of built my life around looking after her – and that kind of, took me off, distracted me from other stuff that was difficult (L4/6-7).

Joy's importance to her is reflected in her belief that others are missing out, 'poor them' (L9/17): 'if you haven't got that, if you haven't had that experience then you don't understand how significant a pet can be' (L9/17).

Violet echoes Louise's belief:

I find it quite difficult to form a bond sometimes with people who are completely anti-pets – it's like, how can you not have anything in your life? (V14/22)

In early childhood Violet felt a sense of belonging and being needed when she formed a bond with the family cat. Her place in the family was enhanced along with her self-worth:

I felt special, because ... my little brother was more favoured, by my parents and, the cat, the cat was mine, made me happy...gave me a bit more belonging, or needed, wanted (V7-8/11-12).

Violet identifies strongly with cats as a species declaring her affinity cheerfully to the world. She has her own website with a feline name, and wears a tee-shirt with

two little eyes, and it just says 'feral' across it.... people know I'm the crazy cat lady (laughs) (V14/22).

Similarly, Anne is happy to incorporate cats firmly into her identity:

I'm probably you know one of these people who's most likely to be voted crazy cat lady by everybody that I know (A8/13).

In her workplace Anne has chosen to decorate her identity badge with cats partly to personalise her appearance in an environment where people wear uniforms:

like a load of Stepford wives – so I suppose that's my, my personalisation (A20/47).

She also feels that the images cheer others, particularly as children visit her department:

I think cats generally – they make you smile ...you think about something like that, and it makes you smile, then it makes your day a bit brighter (A20/48).

Charlotte believes that her affinity with animals relates to her childhood experience of being adopted:

a person who's adopted as a child quite often will put a lot of our relationships in with animals (C12/39).

She notices that she bonds easily with animals, '*there was just something about me bonding with animals*' (C11/36). Animals seem to arrive without her seeking them:

a lot of these animals I wasn't really looking for them, they just happened to come into my life (C11/38).

Her relationship with Amber is such an important part of her self-concept that she feels conflicted when her boyfriend spends time with Amber, and through his voluntary work, takes disabled people to see her:

I felt a bit jealous at first – and then I felt a bit guilty, why should I keep her to myself (C15/47).

Though acknowledging these feelings, and growing in self-awareness, Charlotte has developed an interest in equine facilitated therapy (EFT), a direction she is now

considering for her future career (C14/35). In learning to share Amber, she has made her horse a yet more central part of her life.

Through linking the four participants' testimonies across the major and sub-themes, commonalties and idiosyncrasies have been exposed. Taken together, the positive, life-enhancing aspects of the companion relationships are expressed in the array of received pleasures: laughter, fun, happiness, delight, joy, warmth, generosity, understanding, wholeness, wonder and affirmation. These pleasures are felt to be reliable, uncomplicated, healing and transforming. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed within the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

5.0 Chapter Five – Discussion

In the previous chapter, the words of the four participants give vivid testimony to the value of the animal companions in their lives. The essence of their experiences has been captured within three major themes. The findings, within each major theme, will be explored in this chapter in order to relate them to the research of others, as examined in Chapter Two.

The sense of not being alone, which emerges as important to each of the participants, is explored in a number of the studies. No matter where other family members might be, the presence of the animal is a comforting constant (Cavanaugh et al, 2008; Staats et al. 2006; Sable, 2012; Wood et al. 2007). Louise does not have to see her dog to have a '*constant*' sense of her '*positive presence*' (L6-7/12). Each of the participants values the sense of presence their animals give within their homes. They express a dread of the emptiness they would experience without them (V15/25; L6-7/12; C19/60; A4/8). Violet speaks of her house '*missing a wholeness*' (V11/17) which Walsh (2009a) believes is a fundamental part of the bond with companion animals: '*Bonds with companion animals may not be our whole lives, but they can make our lives whole*' (p.476). Stewart et al. (1989), when considering bereavement following the loss of a companion animal, tell of the emptiness pet owners can suffer, once their home is no longer shared with the animal. Research shows that companion animals can shield owners against this emptiness (Chur-Hansen et al., 2009; Franklin, 1999; Siegel, 1990). It is the participants' expectation that their animals will provide this shield (V4/4; L13/23; A6/10; C19/59). Franklin (1999) looks at the changes in modern western society that have contributed to the acceptance of companion animals as a welcome buffer against loneliness: '*pets can provide companionship, love and attention to humans wherever it is required. In late*

modernity we are now self-consciously aware of their value and unselfconscious in acknowledging it' (p.104). The impact of the social context which Franklin describes is evident in the participants' expectations of their pets.

It is not simply a passive role that the animals play in filling the home; the playfulness and the sensory pleasures bring real benefits (Beck & Katcher, 1996; Noonan, 2008; Owen, 2008; Robinson, 1995; Sable, 2013). According to Beck & Katcher, companion animals affect us in primarily visual ways, tapping into our hidden wishes to behave badly, idiotically and clownishly:

the dog can be thought of as a mime, a comic psychotherapist who represents to us in pictures the content of our unconscious urges and the contradictions between those urges and our civilized way of life, a function performed by traditional clowns. (1996, p.183)

Indeed the participants echo this joy in their animals' cheeky, cute, clever and quirky qualities: laughter is a major part of the relationships. Louise delights in the comic mime her dog Joy performs when told to get off the sofa (L8/15). Cat owners Ann, Charlotte and Violet each tell of the daily pleasures of watching their cats in action (A3/3; C18/57; V3/2).

When Violet likens her cats to panthers, she is admiring their sleekness and beauty, making a link to wildness and danger, which Beck & Katcher (1996) recognize as part of the human-animal bond. Ann (A9/20) describes herself as '*not a particularly maternal person*' yet she feels her response to her cats is a '*different expression*' of the maternal instinct. Serpell (1996) writes of how '*humans have exaggerated or enhanced the neotenous, child-like qualities of companion animals through generation of unconscious selection*' (p.143). Rather than denigrating the neoteny and anthropomorphising of pets, he believes that '*By virtue of their resemblance to*

children, pets can undoubtedly provide their owners with comparable psychological rewards' (ibid). The sheer fascination and delight which Violet takes in her cats' appearance is reflected in Knapp's description of her dog:

I have become enchanted by the small asymmetrical whorls of white fur on either side of her chest... by her eyes, which are watchful and intelligent, the color of chestnuts ... I seem to spend a great deal of time just staring at the dog, struck by how mysterious and beautiful she is to me (1998, p.6).

The rewards of cuddling, stroking and hearing the purr of a cat feature strongly in the three cat owning participants' accounts (A3/4; C18/57; V/3). We know from several studies that these aspects bring benefits to physical and mental wellbeing (Robinson, 1995). Because we can touch our animals and receive their nuzzlings and licks, this gives the relationship a particular quality which is necessarily missing in the relationship between client and counsellor. Beck & Katcher tell us that '*The difficult art in therapy is achieving a mutual feeling of intimacy without touching*' (1996, p.92). They are not saying that dogs make better psychotherapist than humans, but they are struck by the power of their physical intimacy in bestowing wellbeing.

Developments in AAT and AAI rely on their being a strong bond between people and companion animal relationship so that the animal can be brought into a person's life specifically to give therapeutic or practical aid. The positive developments in these fields of research can be seen to have had an impact on the participants' experiences. Louise reveals that her belief in the benefits of people's relationships with companion animals has coloured her thoughts and intentions. She is unequivocal that she expected her dog to be '*the best way*' to bring happiness back into her life (L1/1). With a clear image of her spaniel prior to finding her, Louise names her Joy: a significant naming which expressed an expectation (Noonan,

2008). The names that people give their pets are frequently a *'word or symbol that links the animal and the person'* (Beck & Katcher, 1996, p.14); Louise's bond with Joy and the dog's identity existed before they became a reality. The expectation alone might bring benefits and resilience (Staats et al., 2006; Wells, 2011). Charlotte's belief in her horse's therapeutic qualities gave her a desire to share her with others in need, and she envisages a future for herself in EFT (C14/45; C17/54). She too is strongly influenced by her belief in the companion animal bond as bringing benefits.

That the bond exists is widely accepted and exploited in AAT and AAI; the nature of the bond is scrutinised and compared to human attachment theories. Sable is clear that the bond has significant attributes of an adult attachment as defined by Bowlby:

A threat to the figure's accessibility will evoke protest and other measures to ward off separation or loss, and a permanent loss will evoke grief and mourning (Bowlby 1973, 1980). Once we understand these aspects of attachment, the devotion to pets begins to make sense. Our pets ... provide proximity, and prompt positive feelings such as joy and laughter that make people feel less alone and lonely; in other words they furnish a component of attachment that promotes well-being and security, as well as affording opportunities for caregiving and commitment (Sable, 2013, p.98).

She identifies much that is similar to that of an adult human attachment though with an emphasis on the care-giving and commitment elements of the attachment. In his work defining and measuring the attachment bonds between people and their dogs, Kobak (2009) discusses Kurbek's (2009) findings, and he also concludes that the bond is more consistent with that of caregiver than a true attachment figure since the relationship does not entirely fulfil all the criteria, such as *'safe haven'* and *'secure base behaviour'*, as defined by Ainsworth (1991) and Bowlby (1979). Nevertheless,

he is clear that there is a case for further research to establish if the affectional bond goes deep enough for a dog to be a true attachment figure. Stewart et al. (1989) believe that *'It is the pet's preverbal attachment attitude that satisfies the human repressed need for nurturance. The pet's nonverbal acceptance and response to the human enables trust'* (p.149). That ability to communicate non-verbally (A4/8; C9/28; L9/16; V21/44) and to elicit a caring response certainly contributes to the participants' sense of being needed and appreciated (A15/33; L3/6; V11/18).

Yet each participant also attests to a specialness in the relationship (A18/43; L2/2; C4/11; V21/44). Knapp (1998) finds the attachment to have a extraordinary type of closeness, a *'brand of proximity'* that is not one she would want to have with another human being; to be *'that inseparable or entwined'* (p.226) would be intolerable. Charlotte's bond with Amber relies strongly on her care-giving:

I think just me taking my time helped her and she's come and helped me. So, it's a very special relationship (C4/13).

Ann is so committed to caring for her cats that she believes finding a house to rent which is suitable for the animals is more important than finding suitable accommodation for herself. She could live anywhere (A15/32), but the cats depend on her to provide the right type of home for them. Violet feels duty-bound to care when she defies the landlord's regulations in order to provide a home for her cats (V36/18-19). And Louise alters her working life in order to fit in with her puppy's care needs (L4/6-7). The lived experience of the participants is certainly testament to the *'sense of being truly entwined'* (Knapp, 1998, p.226).

Walsh (2209b) cites Allen's (1995) work on coping mechanisms, which found that *'confiding in pets to "discuss" difficult life situations greatly relieved stress'* (p.483). This is borne out in Charlotte's sense that Amber eased her through the difficult

times, and by sharing her trouble with her horse she was strengthened: *'it felt like it was us together'* (C7/23). Violet speaks of her pleasure in the *'random conversations'* (V21/44) she has with her cats. Banning (2012) tells of the empathetic qualities of horses she encounters in EFT, chiming with Charlotte's sense that her horse understands her and reflects her emotions in a manner that enables her to understand herself better (C3/8, 5/6, 6/22, 15/49, 22/69). To her it feels like *'person centred'* empathy (C15/49) even though it is inconceivable that an animal could achieve empathetic understanding which requires a *'capacity to track and sense accurately the feelings and personal meanings'* of the person (Mearns & Thorne, 1999, p.15). Nevertheless, the participants each experience something akin to empathetic understanding (A2/2, 18/43; L18/15, 9/16; V5/6).

The nature of animals' understanding of humans has attracted much research, particularly concerning dogs and humans (Bradshaw, 2011; Fogle 1983, 1981; Knapp, 1998; Serpell, 1995, 1998). Beck & Katcher make a direct comparison between dogs and person centred therapists:

A Rogerian analyst is not unlike a Labrador retriever. The Labrador retriever is certainly not directive. He gives no advice ... He is perceived as empathetic (1996 p.92).

Bradshaw's (2011) extensive study of dogs lead him to conclude that although their emotional lives are more limited than those of humans, nevertheless *'dogs share our capacity to feel joy, love, anger, fear and anxiety'* (p.210). They also read human body language with acute accuracy (ibid). The debates and research continue as to the capacity for empathy in dogs (Coren, 2012; Custance & Mayer, 2012). However, the lived experience of the participants is that their animals understand them in some way, which gives them a positive feeling of wellbeing.

In Irvine's (2013) ethnographical study, the narratives of homeless people provide powerful evidence of animal-companionship as '*Lifesavers and Lifechangers*'.

Louise hesitates and backtracks when she uses the same word 'lifesaver';

life-saver would be a very dramatic way of putting it – in some ways I suppose

- (pause, tearful voice) – yes (L3/5).

However, it is in her mind that Joy played a redemptive role in her life. By providing consistent, reliable bonds, companion-animals have the power to '*facilitate transitions through disruptive life changes*' (Walsh, 2009a, p.470). Each of the participant attests in her own way to this restorative power: Louise through her marriage breakup; Charlotte through her period of anguish and withdrawal; Anne through her depression and anxiety; and Violet through her periods of mental ill-health.

During these periods of difficulty, the participants appreciated the ways in which their animals helped in restoring their wellbeing. Violet and Ann both feel that their cats began the process of lifting their low mood during periods of depression (V10/16; A4/2). The companion animal bond's positive effect on stress, depression and anxiety finds support in many research studies (Anderson et al., 1984; Robinson, 1995; Rowan, 1988; Siegel, 1990). During her recovery, Louise's dog shielded her from the demands of social interactions for which she felt unready (L3/5, 4/6-7, 8/16), as well as facilitating an easy level of social interaction with other dog-walkers:

There wasn't any kind of deep level of interaction or any expectation, it was just ... nice to just talk about inconsequential things that dogs had been doing (L5/8).

This undemanding communication with others is seen as significantly beneficial in many studies (Irvine, 2012; Robinson, 1995; Serpell, 1995,1998; Wood et al., 2007).

Indeed Wood et al (2007) detect a '*social lubricant effect of pets*', particularly dogs because they entice their owners outdoors into their neighbourhoods.

Charlotte's horse Amber helped her break free from her isolation and inability to express her herself, through an emotional connection that she compares to the person-centred counselling approach (C15/49). Amber gave her '*a very honest reflection*' of her emotions, something which Knapp (1998) attests to in her study of the connections between human beings and animals. Owen (2008) notices that her counselling clients

who report intense difficulties relating to human beings sometimes describe very positive relations with their pets or horses. They often cite the consistency and unconditional nature of their animal's affection as the reason. It is true that animals do not judge a human being by their intelligence, achievements, status or attractiveness and this perhaps alleviates some of the pressures in human to human interactions (p.49).

Charlotte's experience with Amber echoes Owen's observations. Her troubled history left her wary of close human relationships. However, she trusts horses to let her try and fail:

What I have found over the years is that animals are the most forgiving creatures. It doesn't matter if you get something wrong – you can try again – they'll deal with it (C20/65).

The easiness and reliability of the relationships seems to alleviate stress for the participants. During her divorce, Louise welcomed the positive contrast of relating to her dog as opposed to dealing with the complexity of human relationships (L14/27).

Beck & Katcher (1996) emphasise the constancy of animals' responses to their owners as an important factor in conferring a sense of being safe and wanted: '*A pet's welcome is restorative and signals that everything is as it was when you left; everything is safe, and you have not changed, either*' (p.29). The sense of being greeted is important to the participants (C19/61; V16/26). As Lorenz (1964) says, it is impossible to feel alone if at least one being is pleased to see you.

Enthusiastic greeting is not the only aspect of the animals' behaviour that is affirming and a boost to self-esteem. The feeling of being the special one in the animal's life (A2/2; C11/38, 15/47; L7/14; V7-8/11-12, 18/36) confers self-worth. There is evidence in each of the participants' accounts that their animals are motivating in ways that are life-enhancing (A15/33; C20/65; L10/18; V11/18). The benefits to people's physical health (Cavanaugh et al., 2008; Friedmann et al., 1980; Siegel, 1993) through pet ownership depend heavily upon the motivational aspects of the relationship with the animal, as do the psychological benefits (Fawcett & Gullone, 2001; Fogle, 1981, 1983; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Levenson, 1969; Odendaal, 2002; Peacock et al., 2012). In the context of recovery from illness, Noonan (2008) remarks on how people will often '*do something for their pet that they would not do for themselves, and this enhances their sense of being needed*' (p.404), thus speeding up their recovery. Violet endorses this benefit in her account of recovering quickly from a panic attack because the cats needed her: '*they actually really helped me pull through that ... I could have quite easily been in a state for several hours*' (V11/17).

It is not only during difficult times that the companion animals supply a central importance in the participants' lives. The animals are bound up in their companion human's identity. Charlotte recognises in herself a drive towards being with animals (C13/39). She also notices that she attracts animals to her (C11/38). She

speculates that having been adopted and troubled in childhood might have increased the intensity of the bond with animals, a view which Walsh (2009a) supports through her experience of counselling clients. Both Ann and Violet embrace cats into their identities (A8/13, 20/47; V14/22), and Louise is adamant that others '*are really missing out on something really special*' (L16/33) if they have not experienced how special the relationship can be (L9/17). She feels '*blessed*' (L9/16). Harraway (2003) appears to be in tune with Ann, Louise, Charlotte and Violet when she says that humans are also companion animals:

There cannot be just one companion species; there have to be at least two to make one. It is in the syntax; it is in the flesh (p.12).

And their strong bonds and connections with their animals are special, deep and important enough for each participant to trumpet them to the world.

Indeed the participants are enthusiastic and open in exploring the bonds they feel. There are few moments when they hesitate or trivialise. It is important to acknowledge that interpreting deeper meaning from the participants' language using IPA methods alone must be tentative (McLeod, 2011; Willig, 2008). Yet these moments occur noticeably when they speak with a degree of anthropomorphism that causes them discomfort (A9/20; L3/5; V11/18). It seems that cultural influences on their feelings about anthropomorphism might spring from negative views such as those of Bradshaw (2011), rather than the more positive views of Franklin (1999) and Serpell (2002). However, the data are insufficient to support the notion that people might be reluctant to share their deep feelings about their companion animals, a point I will return to in the following chapter.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

To conclude this study I will consider the extent to which the findings fulfil the investigation I embarked upon. I will also reflect upon the impact the research has had on me as a counsellor. Lastly, I will suggest what the findings might mean for further studies and practice in counselling.

I chose the subject for this study because my personal experience led me to suspect that the day-to-day, taken-for-granted experience of the companion animal relationship was life-enhancing. The narratives of Ann, Charlotte, Louise and Violet lend strong support to my originating premise. In the main, the literature in the area also chimes with my findings, particular that of therapists Banning, Owen, Walsh and Noonan. I share similar experiences to those of Owen (2008). She noticed one day that when her anxious client focused on a blue tit outside during a counselling session, he became '*instantly calmer*' (p.47). When one of my clients spotted a fox through the window during a session, he suddenly relaxed, laughed and consequently our rapport grew. Another client, anxious over grave troubles in her life, smiled and grew calm as she spoke of her dog, an oasis of joy in her distress. Moreover, I remember callers to Samaritans who spoke of their pets as an anchor, helping them contain suicidal ideations, a phenomenon that Walsh (2009a) has also experienced in her work with clients. As a result of hearing the testaments of my participants, I feel increasingly able to recognise the importance of the human-animal bonds in my clients' lives.

There is nothing peripheral or trivial about the relationships the participants describe with their companion animals. Indeed the centrality and importance in their lives is striking. Yet the participants' stories go beyond what I expected. It was unexpected that each would reveal that they had emerged from difficult times in their lives with a

sense that their companion animal relationship had been restorative, sustaining and motivating. The companionship of animals is, of course, not a ubiquitous panacea; indeed many people are uncomfortable near animals. Animals, wild or domesticated, have an array of negative aspects which humans can encounter, such as allergies, phobias, nuisance, disease and physical danger (Bradshaw, 2013, 2011; Franklin, 1999; Owen, 2008; Podberscek, 2000), nevertheless, the benefits to wellbeing are indisputable, and supported in the lived experiences of the participants. Owen writes that:

In the course of therapy, the client may spontaneously describe their interactions with animals or other aspects of the natural world. In doing so they perhaps provide a wealth of information about their beliefs, values and the processes in which they engage. Consideration of a client's relationship with the animal world in isolation would seem limiting but the exploration of this in relation to the overall context of their life seems to add an extra dimension of understanding (2008, p.51).

An 'extra dimension of understanding' that the findings of this study endorse.

As a person centred counsellor in training, I find it salutary to consider that for some people there might be times when the transforming qualities of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are more readily assessable through their animal relationship. Sheldrake (2000) notices the power of the animal's unconditional love:

For clients with low self-esteem, it is difficult to accept that any human can have much regard for them, and so it is hard to feel counsellors really accept them... they feel that if all were revealed, the acceptance would be withdrawn.

By contrast, they can easily believe that their animal loves them unconditionally (p. 80).

In Sheldrake's description the animal is more of a substitute for the therapist than an ally in the therapy. At times, the four participants experienced this extreme when their animals gave them what no human could. It seems that for some, the fur-coated companion can fit their emotional needs, offering a uniquely valuable relationship when life feels dark.

And, in the main, it is not a relationship that the participants are hesitant to discuss, nor do they trivialise their experiences. When I embarked upon this study, I suspected that people might feel inhibited in speaking about the depth of the bond; such a finding could be a useful factor for counsellors to consider when working with clients. Little emerged to support this notion, thus further research would be needed in order to establish if such a phenomenon is prevalent. With my small, purposive sample of four, it was not possible to explore this aspect. However, it might be fruitful to interview experienced counsellors who have worked with clients who have significant companion animal bonds, to continue the investigation.

In the field of mental health, Walsh (2009a) is clear that research and training pay scant attention the human-animal bond. She believes that:

we can enrich clinical practice through a more holistic and open-minded view of the potential contribution of animal bonds to human healing and well-being (p.476).

Following this study, I concur with her as it has confirmed the important contribution of pets to the participants' happiness and wellbeing. To prize the precious bonds that clients might have with their animals, adds a significant dimension to our understanding of their world. As such, I suggest that the human-animal bond merits

attention in counselling training, research and practice. It is appropriate to give Louise the final words as she summarises the wellbeing she experiences:

all the pressures of life, there's something easy and simple about my dog and the relationship I have with her. And that's great – I think that's great (L13/23).

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Research Search Strategy

Research topic

The significance to people's wellbeing of their relationships with pets. (Focus, counselling.)

Key words

Wellbeing, pets, relationship, counselling

Alternative words

Wellbeing	Pets	Relationship	Counselling
Happiness	Animal	Connection	Therapy
Security	Creature	Affiliation	Psychotherapy
Health	Non-human	Bond	
Comfort	Companion animal	Rapport	
Welfare		Attachment	
Contentment			
Confidence			
Mental health			
Benefit			
Self esteem			

Wildcards or truncations

Wellbeing	Pets	Relationship	Counselling
Wel*being	Animal*	Relationship*	Therap*
(mental health OR wel*being)	Pet*	connection*	Psychotherap*
	Companion animal*	Bond*	Counsel*

Search strings

animal* OR pet* OR non-human AND relationship* OR connection* OR rapport OR bond* AND wel*being OR (Mental health) OR (mental wel*being) OR counsel* OR psychotherapy* OR therap*

Literature Search Websites and Databases

The American Psychological Association: The Section on Human Animal Interaction: Research & Practice - <http://www.apa-hai.org/human-animal-interaction/>

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) <http://www.bacp.co.uk/>

The British Psychological Society - <http://www.bps.org.uk/>

Cochrane Library

The Companion Animal Welfare Council - <http://www.cawc.org.uk/companion-animals>

EthOS

FEDIAF, The European Pet Food Industry Federation - <http://www.fediaf.org/>

Google

Google Books

Google Scholar

International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations - <http://www.iahaio.org/>

The International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ)- <http://www.isaz.net/>

Medline

PsychARTICLES

PsychBOOKS

PsychINFO

The Society for Companion Animal Studies- <http://www.scas.org.uk/>

SocINDEX

The University of Chester Library - <https://portal.chester.ac.uk/LIS/Pages/finding-information.aspx>

The University of Southampton - <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/>

The WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition - <http://www.waltham.com/>

Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Table 1**The Growth of Human-Animal Bond (HAB) Research.**

1974	<i>Joint Advisory Committee on Pets in Society (JACOPIS, United Kingdom)</i>
1976	<i>Association Francaise d'Information et de Recherche sur l'Animal de Compagnie (France), www.afirac.org</i>
1977	<i>Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on the Human-Pet Relationship (Austria), www.iemt.at</i>
1977	<i>Center on Interaction of Animals and Society (University of Pennsylvania, USA), www.vet.upenn.edu/cias</i>
1977	<i>Delta Foundation that in 1981 became Delta Society (USA), www.deltasociety.org</i>
1979	<i>Group for the Study of Human-Companion Animal Bond that in 1982 became Society for Companion Animal Studies (United Kingdom), www.scas.org.uk</i>
1980	<i>Joint Advisory Committee on Pets in Society (JACOPIS, Australia)</i>
1981	<i>AVMA Task Force on the Human-Animal Bond (USA), www.avma.org</i>
1981	<i>Animal Medical Center Institute for the Human-Companion Animal Bond (New York City-USA)</i>
1981	<i>Center to Study Human-Animal Relationships and Environments (CENSHARE, University of Minnesota-USA), www.censhare.umn.edu</i>
1982	<i>Center for Applied Ethology and Human-Animal Interactions which in 1997 became Center for the Human-Animal Bond (Purdue University-Indiana, USA), www.vet.purdue.edu.</i>
1987	<i>The journal Anthrozoös was first published</i>
1991	<i>The International Society of Anthrozoology (ISAZ) was formed in Cambridge, United Kingdom</i>
1993	<i>The journal Society and Animals was first published</i>

(Hines, 2003, Podberscek, Paul & Serpell, 2000)

Research Information Sheet

Title of dissertation:

The happiness factor: pet owners and their experiences of wellbeing gained through their relationships with their companion animals.

About me:

I am a third year postgraduate student at Chester University studying for an MA in Clinical Counselling and a volunteer Samaritan listener. My counselling placement is at a GP practice.

My Research:

My research will be a small-scale project in which I investigate the significance for people of their **experiences of relating to a companion animal**. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the human/non-human relationship enhances wellbeing, not only during the life of the animal but also as an enduring part of the person's life experience.

What does participating in this research mean?

If you choose to put yourself forward to participate your involvement will be an hour-long audio-recorded interview which will offer the opportunity to explore your experience. The interview will be held at a mutually convenient, safe and confidential location. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio-recording and this will become my data. I will send you a copy of the transcript for you to check for accuracy. Your data will be analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis methods and will then be compared to the data from other participants to identify themes. Once the analysis is complete you may wish to see the results to ensure that they are a true account of your experience.

What are the potential risks?

There is a risk that exploring this topic may bring up unexpected painful feelings for you. If this were the case, I would hope that you would be able to use the support of counselling services.

Confidentiality:

Throughout the research and writing up of my dissertation I will ensure that your anonymity is protected by allocating a pseudonym to all information relating to your involvement in the project. Any information that could identify you or any other person will not be included in the project. Any parts of the interview that could identify you or another person will not be used in the research. With your consent, verbatim sections of the interview may be used in the final dissertation.

Selection of Participants:

In order to participate in the study, people should have had meaningful, significant experiences with a companion animal for a period in their lives. However, I cannot include people who work with animals professionally such as farmers, zookeepers, animal welfare workers or zoologists. It is also important that no dual relationship, such as friendship or colleague relationship exists between me and my participants.

Benefits of the research:

I hope that the participants will find it personally rewarding to focus on the meaningfulness of their relationship with their companion animals.

What will happen to the results:

The results of my research will form part of my MA dissertation which will be submitted to Chester University who will keep a copy, and the dissertation may also be available electronically. The results may also form part of other works which are put forward for publication.

Data Protection:

My data will consist of audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews with my research participants. The interviews will be recorded onto a digital recorder, which will be kept in a locked metal box in home when not in use. Recordings will be transferred onto my computer and will be password protected. Files will be saved under a pseudonym so that individuals cannot be recognised from the file name. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the research to protect the participants' anonymity and that of any person they mention or their companion animals. A back up copy of the files will be held on a pen drive which will be kept in a locked metal box.

Ethics:

I will carry out my research in line with the Ethical Framework of Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy and the University's Research Governance Handbook in order to protect my participants from harm and loss and to enhance the trustworthiness of my study. At each stage of the process I will work with my supervisor, and the written guidance, in order to safeguard my participants and ensure the trustworthiness of my research.

Complaints:

If any cause for complaint arises during the process, participants can contact my supervisor: Name and contact details given

Contact details: Jane Johnson: Email: number given: Phone: number given

Semi-structured interview Questions

Research topic
The significance to people's wellbeing of their relationships with pets.

Introduction: we can go down whatever path you want – don't worry where you go.

Possible questions and prompts

- Tell me about the pet that has been most significant to you (either past or present).

Prompts

How has the animal contributed to your happiness?

What motivated you to get a pet?

Childhood memories of pets?

- Tell me about the ways your pet affects your mood?

Prompts

How does your pet impact on you day-to-day?

Family, friends, acquaintances- any observations?

- People speak of a bond – what is your feeling about that?

Prompts

Any surprises to you?

Life without the animal around?

Effects on your mood?

Changes you have noticed?

- What are your experiences of talking about your pet with other people?

Prompts

Free or inhibited?

What makes a difference?

- Anything else you'd like to talk about?

M. A. in Clinical Counselling Research**University of Chester****Consent Form: Audio/Digital Recording of Interview****Title of Study: The Happiness Factor: Pet Owners and Their Experiences of Wellbeing Gained Through Their Relationships with Their Companion Animals**

Ihereby give consent for the details of a written transcript based on an audio/digital recorded interview with me and **Jane Johnson** to be used in preparation and as part of a research dissertation for the M.A. in Clinical Counselling at the University of Chester. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous and that all personally identifiable information will remain confidential and separate from the research data. I further understand that the transcript may be seen by Counselling Tutors and the External Examiner for the purpose of assessment and moderation. I also understand that all these individuals are bound by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

I understand that I will have access to the transcribed material and would be able to delete or amend any part of it. I am aware that I can stop the interview at any time or ultimately withdraw the interview, without giving a reason or explanation, at any point before the submission of the dissertation. Upon satisfactory completion of the M.A. in Clinical Counselling the recording will be securely destroyed. The transcripts and related data will be securely stored for a period of five years, by me, the researcher, and then destroyed.

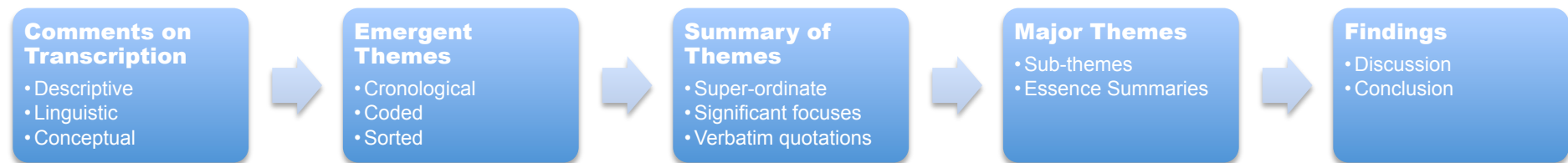
Excerpts from the transcript will be included in the dissertation. A copy of the dissertation will be held in the Department of Social Studies and Counselling and may be made available electronically through Chester Rep, the University's online research repository.

Without my further consent some of the material may be used for publication and/or presentations at conferences and seminars. Every effort will be made to ensure complete anonymity.

Finally I confirm I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet and was given the opportunity for further explanation by the researcher. I believe I have been given sufficient information about the nature of this research, including any possible risks, to give my informed consent to participate.

Signed [Participant].....**Name- Please Print.....****Date****Signed [Researcher]****Name - Please Print.....****Date**

Flowchart showing analysis stages of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process



Example from Verbatim Interview Transcript - First stage of analysis, comments: Descriptive , Linguistic , Conceptual				
Code	Themes		Transcription	Comments
20	Bond Humour	Charlotte	Yeah, yeah – and I don't feel with her like – I felt a lot of pressure when I first had her that I should be out riding her and competing – but now I just feel like she's one of the family, she's like a friend. I don't feel that pressure – it's funny, but I actually probably do more now than we ever did then (<i>laughs</i>) – because we are both kind of, 'well it doesn't really matter either way.' She's quite happy to stay in a field eating all the time but	one of the family, she's like a friend Pressure from others speaking with one voice with Amber - humour
21		Jane	It sounds as though quite a lot's changed then during the time that you've had her with you?	
21	Constancy Healing	Charlotte	Yes, erm, very much on a personal level for me. I came to terms with a lot of abuse that I went through. I dealt with that – and a lot of problems I've had with my family. I've gone through a lot of stuff with that – and obviously being on the course as well, so the last four or five years have been like a roller coaster really – and she's been like the one constant who's always been there.	Coming through important changes she's been like the one constant roller coaster - metaphor
22		Jane	Erm, so she's played a significant role in that journey?	
22	She made things better Beyond words Mysterious, spiritual?	Charlotte	Yeah, when I've needed some space, I've spent time with her – she's er... It's kind of hard to explain how I used to feel when I first had her – er – I felt I couldn't really express myself to anyone – erm. I felt very isolated in a lot of ways. I felt I couldn't really talk to anyone in many ways. And yet when I was with her I felt that everything was alright – erm. I has, it's just been a really special bond that - it's kind of hard to put into words	when I was with her I felt that everything was alright I couldn't talk to people really special bond that - it's kind of hard to put into words

Emergent Themes – chronological – colour coded to link themes

Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Give and take	Visual pleasure important	Cheering during bad times	Hugely important in life
Presence	Bond	Constant companion	Unique characters
Always there, constant, not going away	Tactile	Witness to my life	Attracted to animal's particular character
I'm the one special person	Presence	Motivating when very low	Animal knows me, responds to mood
Strong bond	Empty space filled	Brought me happiness	Helped me through bad patch
Animal knows my moods	It must be the right animal – not just any animal	Helped me communicate when withdrawn	Learnt about self through animal
Protective bond	They care for me	No let downs, trusted her when others had hurt me	Reflection of self in animal
Fun through the behaviour	Talking to cats important to me	Loyal, dependent	Difficult to describe – beyond word
They know things beyond expectation	Healing – beyond our understanding	Helped with emotional stability	Companionship, constant
Visual delight, beautiful	Feeling of being looked after	Life-saver	Reciprocal caring, special bond, mutual support
Soothing to touch and hear	Make me feel good	Gave routine	Caring, kindness, mothering
Communication through non-language means	Cat give house a feeling of wholeness	Hesitant about expressing depth and importance of relationship	Solace at difficult times, therapeutic
Positive effect on mood	Cats chose me – singled me out for special attention	Dog didn't expect anything beyond the basics – gave unconditional positive regard?	One of the family, friendship
None of human relationship negatives	My childhood cat gave me self-esteem. I felt special.	Part of the process of recovery	Constant

Active presence	Belonging, needed, wanted – having a purpose	Re-organised working life around dog. Identity as dog owner important to self	Hard to explain, special bond through difficult times
Observation leads to enjoyment – interplay	Sadness at death of cat	Gave her time to recover without usual social demands – safe.	Togetherness, connected, more than a companion
Unique to me	Play, physical contact	Distracted me from difficult stuff. Survival aid.	Not able to let a person get close
Sense of importance to animal	Aided recovery - therapeutic	Made me engage with others – but at safe, light, easy level.	Unique bond
Helps through difficult times	My commitment to them helped me through bad time	Enjoys company of other dog walkers - community	She made me different, able to communicate
Response to human pain	Reciprocal caring relationship	Focus on dogs with others – enjoyable – I warm to others	Joy, fun, humour
Happy house	Massively positive effect of mood	Important part of life	Funny activities
Special animal – not just any	Gives them human qualities – and is amused	Pure happiness, cheers me, makes me smile	Cat knows my feelings
Empty without animal	Dependent, childlike, infant relationship	Lively presence, she's always there, constant	Can manipulate me, knows the effect
They are always there	Beneficial interplay with daughter – teaching her	Fun, but trouble	Communication effective
Sense of more than I can understand	Important part of mother-daughter interplay – aids communication	House empty without her	Different characters, unique
I am added to by my animals – made more significant	Talks freely to others about cats – it's who I am.	Special relationship, bond	Human attributes, reflection of self
Identity link to cats, self image	Others miss out if they don't have the experience	Might be imagining it, but it doesn't matter. Something special exists	Playfulness
Connection to the childish – not maternal, but they fill a space	Wears visible evidence of cats – part of identity	She knows my feelings	Wants me – special bond – they found me
Part of my journey, through it all, as companion	Empty house – not a place I wanted to be	Member of family	Chosen by my cats
Affinity with others	Helps through times when	Humour	Feeling that they found me.

	daughter is away		
Playfulness	Sense of wholeness in home	Communication	Having been adopted perhaps made her put more into animal relationship
Part of family	Sleeps better when cats are there	Enjoys the anthropomorphic while aware of its untruth	Something innate, needed from inside
Different characters of animals	Sounds of being greeted	Helps my emotional and mental well-being	Unconditional
Exclusive relationship – the cat is mine	Playfulness, playmates for daughter	Therapeutic	Guilty about keeping relationship to myself – sharing was hard – unique relationship under threat
I helped the animal	Friendship and companionship	Some people find the relationship odd	Growing interest in equine therapy
Peaceful feeling	They exceed expectations – more than	Feel sorry for those without companion animal	Animal as rescuer, therapist, support
Sees shadows of them when not there	Conversation – strange – beyond the expected	Connect with other animal people	Person centred qualities
I'm happier	Unexplained power to know who is a good person	Pet as filling role of child	Reflected back of my emotions
Lifts spirits	They know more than me	Feel blessed	The one thing holding me together
Sense of purpose, motivation, having to keep going	Humour	Trouble/pleasure balance worthwhile	Not inhibited talking about horse relationship in therapy
They need me – dependent	They are essential in my life	Dog altered my approach to life at a bad time	Routine is calming
Duty, responsibility	Natural relationship	Widened my world	They give me something each day
Special relationship – not shared/experienced entirely with another person	Special relationship – I'm their special person – they are my cats	Focus for enjoyment and happiness	Joy
Reciprocal understanding/caring, they tune in	Difficulties overcome on their behalf – they are worth it	Dog knows how to interact - cheeky	Humour, make me laugh, fun amusement

Intelligence, cleverness	Enjoys their activities	Joyful memories	Part of family
Humour, make me laugh, make others laugh, can manipulate	Tactile comfort, physical closeness	Sad at losing dog and leaving dog	Trouble, but loved (toddler-like?)
Aware I might be fanciful	Enforced functioning – they stopped me completely withdrawing	Fears dog's death	Would feel empty without
Brings out my kindness	Relax me when I'm tense	Positive boost to well-being	Thinking of them amuses me
Communication beyond words, unspoken understanding	Very clear benefits to my well-being	Importance is over and above expectations	Cat wait and welcome me
Animal singles her out – makes her special	Saved me – cared for me, can't imagine them not being there	More than simple presence	They know I'm coming
Cheer me up when out of sight		With me through all my troubles and changes	Warmth, calmness, peace – mental and physical
		She is the only one who has been there. Unique relationship. Nobody else has witnessed it all.	responsibility
		Sense of continuity	Forgiving – in contrast to humans – non-judgemental
		Loyal, she won't let me down, when people will.	Developed empathy through relationship – seeing it from their perspective
		Fun	
		Something to hold onto that was good, redeemer, life-saver	
		Honest, simple, pure, no game-playing, easy	

Emergent Themes – Grouped

Constant physical presence filling the emptiness (Major theme – Presence)			
Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Presence	Presence	Constant companion	Companionship, constant
Always there, constant, not going away	Empty space filled	<u>Witness</u> to my life	Constant
Active presence	Cat give house a feeling of wholeness	Lively presence, she's always there, constant	Would feel empty without
Empty without animal	Empty house – not a place I wanted to be	House empty without her	Attracted to animal's particular character
They are <u>always there</u>			Different characters, unique
Sees shadows of them when not there	Sense of <u>wholeness</u> in home		Unique characters

Bond, friendship, part or family, companion through life. The animal's unique character – not just any animal - Sense of something beyond what is understood. Fear of loss. (Major theme – Bond . Subthemes: something more than. Loss? Unique animal character. Pure qualities of relationship.)			
Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Strong bond	Bond	Member of family	Part of family
<u>Part of my journey</u> , through it all, as companion	Friendship and companionship	She knows my feelings	Having been adopted perhaps made her put more into animal relationship
Part of family	It must be the right animal – not just any animal	Sense of <u>continuity</u>	Something innate, needed from inside
They know things beyond	They exceed expectations –	Dog knows how to interact -	Hugely important in life

expectation	more than	cheeky	
Communication beyond words, unspoken understanding	Conversation – strange – beyond the expected	Hesitant about expressing depth and importance of relationship	One of the family, friendship
Animal knows my moods	Unexplained power to know who is a good person	Might be imagining it, but it doesn't matter. Something special exists	Animal knows me, responds to mood
Communication through non-language means	They know more than me	Some people find the relationship odd	Person centred qualities
Response to human pain	Healing – beyond our understanding	Importance is over and above expectations	Cat wait and welcome me
Different characters of animals	Sadness at death of cat	More than simple presence	They know I'm coming
Sense of more than I can understand		Sad at losing dog and leaving dog	Cat wait and welcome me
Aware I might be fanciful		Fears dog's death	They know I'm coming
			Togetherness , connected, more than a companion
			Difficult to describe – beyond word

<p>Understanding and response, including help through bad times. Animal's way of relating leads to positive experience, reciprocal, life enhancing, simple, pure in contrast to human relationships. Sense of purpose, motivation. Self, identity (Major theme – Enhancing: therapeutic, purpose, positive change, identity, redeemer, life-saver.)</p>			
Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Helps through difficult times	They care for me	Cheering during bad times	

Protective bond	Talking to cats important to me	Motivating when very low	Helped me through bad patch
Unique to me	Feeling of being looked after	Helped me communicate when withdrawn	Solace at difficult times, therapeutic
Sense of importance to animal	Aided recovery - therapeutic	Helped with emotional stability	Cat knows my feelings
I'm the one special person	My commitment to them helped me through bad time	Life-saver	Hard to explain, special bond through difficult times
Special animal – not just any	Massively positive effect of mood	Part of the process of recovery	Not able to let a person get close
I am added to by my animals – made more significant	Helps through times when daughter is away	Gave her time to recover without usual social demands – safe.	Developed empathy through relationship – seeing it from their perspective
Exclusive relationship – the cat is mine	Enforced functioning – they stopped me completely withdrawing	Distracted me from difficult stuff. Survival aid.	Can manipulate me, knows the effect
Special relationship – not shared/experienced entirely with another person	Saved me – cared for me, can't imagine them not being there	Therapeutic	Animal as rescuer, therapist, support
Brings out my kindness	Relax me when I'm tense	Helps my emotional and mental well-being	The one thing holding me together
Animal singles her out – makes her special	Cats chose me – singled me out for special attention	Gave routine	
None of human relationship negatives	Make me feel good	Enjoys company of other dog walkers - community	Routine is calming
Affinity with others	Special relationship – I'm their special person – they are my cats	Focus on dogs with others – enjoyable – I warm to others	She made me different, able to communicate
Reciprocal understanding/caring, they tune in	My childhood cat gave me self-esteem. I felt special	Something to hold onto that was good, redeemer, life-saver	Unconditional

Connection to the childish – not maternal, but they fill a space	Reciprocal caring relationship	Important part of life	Communication effective
I helped the animal	Natural relationship	Special relationship, bond	Reciprocal caring, special bond, mutual support
Sense of purpose, motivation, having to keep going	Beneficial interplay with daughter – teaching her	With me through all my troubles and changes	Forgiving – in contrast to humans – non-judgemental
They need me – dependent	Important part of mother-daughter interplay – aids communication	Connect with other animal people	Reflected back of my emotions
Duty, responsibility	Sleeps better when cats are there	Dog didn't expect anything beyond the basics – gave unconditional positive regard?	Growing interest in equine therapy
Identity link to cats, self image	Sounds of being greeted	Made me engage with others – but at safe, light, easy level	Responsibility
	Dependent, childlike, infant relationship	Loyal, dependent	Reflection of self in animal
	Belonging, needed, wanted – having a purpose	Communication	Human attributes, reflection of self
	Talks freely to others about cats – it's who I am.	Loyal, she won't let me down, when people will.	Not inhibited talking about horse relationship in therapy
	Others miss out if they don't have the experience	Honest, simple, pure, no game-playing, easy	
	Wears visible evidence of cats – part of identity	Dog altered my approach to life at a bad time	
		Widened my world	
		Focus for enjoyment and happiness	
		Feel blessed	

		Pet as filling role of child	
		Feel sorry for those without companion animal	

Fun, play, visual delight, touch, humour, positive impact on mood. Unique, special relationship, being chosen, extent of importance. (Major theme – Delight: senses, fun, special qualities)			
Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Fun through the behaviour	Tactile	Brought me happiness	Caring, kindness, mothering
Visual delight, beautiful	Visual pleasure important	Hesitant about expressing depth and importance of relationship	Joy, fun, humour
	Play, physical contact	Fun, but trouble	Funny activities
Soothing to touch and hear	Playfulness, playmates for daughter	She is the only one who has been there. Unique relationship. Nobody else has witnessed it all.	Playfulness
Positive effect on mood	Humour	Re-organised working life around dog. Identity as dog owner important to self	Warmth, calmness, peace – mental and physical
Observation leads to enjoyment – interplay	Enjoys their activities	Pure happiness, cheers me, makes me smile	They give me something each day
Happy house	Tactile comfort, physical closeness	Humour	Joy
Playfulness		Trouble/pleasure balance worthwhile	Humour, make me laugh, fun amusement
Peaceful feeling	Very clear benefits to my well-	Joyful memories	Trouble, but loved (toddler-

	being		like?)
I'm happier	Gives them human qualities – and is amused	Positive boost to well-being	Thinking of them amuses me
Lifts spirits	They are essential in my life	Fun	Unique bond
Intelligence, cleverness	Difficulties overcome on their behalf – they are worth it	Enjoys the anthropomorphic while aware of its untruth	Guilty about keeping relationship to myself – sharing was hard – unique relationship under threat
Humour, make me laugh, make others laugh, can manipulate			Wants me – special bond – they found me
Cheer me up when out of sight			Chosen by my cats
			Feeling that they found me.

Summary of Themes – Anne

[illegible]

<p>Super-ordinate theme 2</p> <p>They know me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We belong together as unit/family • They have intuition and use it to offer comfort • Physical understanding • Body language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we have a strong bond between the three of us • a protective bond • she sort of picks up on things • my sister has really bad panic attacks – if she has a panic attack, she'll find a cat on her knee, which is really weird. sort of intuitive emotional – they don't necessarily understand what's going on but that pain or comfort • they can interpret bits of our body language – and, you know, we can interpret bits of theirs, you know, whilst you are not having a conversation, maybe like you and I are have a conversation, you can kind of ascertain how they are feeling. They seem to pick up on how you are feeling. • I suppose understanding between, you know, sort of, what's going on, but not in like a sort of (<i>sighs, searching for words</i>) spoken English kind of way, you know what I mean? It's a just physical kind of understanding. • I think the most surprising thing about our relationship, just the general sort of unspoken erm understanding. 	<p>1/1</p> <p>2/2</p> <p>2/2</p> <p>5-6/10</p> <p>16/36</p> <p>18/42</p> <p>18/43</p>
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<p>Super-ordinate theme 3</p> <p>They add to me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They helped at a low point • Unerringly positive effect on mood • I'm part of their pack • I'm a bigger presence because of them • Give identity • They make me a happier person • They motive me • Duty and responsibility • Identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was feeling quite down at the time and I think they just ... the things they do – the little quirks they just made me smile. So I think having them around always made me happier. • I don't think they've ever had a negative effect on my mood. • it's almost like a little pack, you know, a little pack, like a little unit. • I'm probably you know one of these people who's you know most likely to be voted crazy cat lady by, erm, everybody that I know I think. • I suppose it gives me another reason, if you like, to keep going, and to, you know, to do that next day when you don't want to do that next day. • we adopted them, and we adopted them to look after them for the rest of their lives, you know, so, yeah, we have a duty to provide them with food and shelter, comfort and everything else, so they are, you know, looked after • for me it give a sense of purpose, you know, erm, 'cos you know you have someone, something that's dependent on you needing to do that, so, you know • I'm really quite into cat's generally, so erm my work, my work badge has (<i>shows badge</i>) a lots of cat badges on the bad as well – my work badge has a ... 	<p>2/2</p> <p>4/8</p> <p>7/13</p> <p>8/13</p> <p>14/31</p> <p>15/33</p> <p>15/34</p> <p>19/45</p>
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<p>Super-ordinate theme 4</p> <p>They bring me joy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It might make me sound strange, but the way they look affects me deeply • Their sound and touch sooth me • They converse with me actively • They are uniquely special • They bring happiness to others • They make me smile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think just – this is going to sound really weird – I think they are very good at looking cute – when you’re feeling – I find, I look at them – I think I get the same reaction to cats that most people get to babies, erm, that they do something cute and you get that sort of warm sort of haa arh • They do a lot of purring, which I find really - I find that really soothing... they’ll both purr and nuzzle and you know... • – it’s quite a sensory ...lots of, yeah I get lots of nuzzling • I don’t know if they understand but they respond to the voice the sound of it and the tone – and yeah and they become vocal • I think it makes it a happy place. People like them. I’ve never met anyone who doesn’t like them. I have a philosophy that people keep telling me they don’t like cats – and I say you haven’t met mine yet so you can’t judge that. • it is a lot of fun. It is a lot of fun. • always sort of nice feels associated with her, you know, just very peaceful. • I think cats generally – they make you smile, you know, and erm so, you know – you think about something like that, you know, and it makes you smile, then it makes your day a bit brighter. 	<p>3/3</p> <p>3/4</p> <p>3/5</p> <p>4/8</p> <p>6/10</p> <p>11/25</p> <p>13/27</p> <p>20/48</p>
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Summary of Themes – Charlotte

Super-ordinate Themes	Significant focuses	Verbatim extracts	Page/section
Super-ordinate theme 1 More than companionship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique characters • Constant companion • Strengthening • Reciprocal care and support • Mothering • Us against the world • Constant companion • Empathising • Desire to share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was like she looked after me. Like it is a really special bond – that it's almost like we understood each other. • I think just me taking my time helped her and she's come and helped me. So, it's a very special relationship. • I tend to want to wrap her up in cotton wool a bit. • it's like I've got this constant companion • It would feel empty without any animals. • we have kind of stuck together through trying different things • she's been like the one constant who's always been there. • it felt like it was us together and it didn't really matter what else was going on in my life • I felt a bit jealous at first – and then I felt a bit guilty, why should I keep her to myself, but ... • he's taking his friends down and enjoying her as much as I do – enjoying Vega. • a sense a bit guilty about keeping them to myself. Erm, but again it something that kind of, I've been doing the counselling course and one of the things I was particularly interested in was equine therapy 	4/11 4/13 5/16 11/36 19/60 3/11 6/21 7/23 15/47 17/54 14/45

<p>Super-ordinate theme 2</p> <p>Transforming: finding myself in her horse Amber</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to connect • Self-knowledge • Reflection of self • Solace • Therapeutic effect • Spiritual experience • Enabled me to communicate with others in deeper way • Purpose through responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as I gradually came out of myself I noticed the change in them, that they wanted to spend time with me and were a lot more playful, so I think they taught me a lot about myself and how I could come across to people and to animals. • there was something in her that reminded her, er, er, of me – reminded me of her – there was just something in there. • I found that I just wanted to go and spend some time with her – just actually having some quiet time with her just really help ground myself and sort my head out – re-balance myself emotionally. • Reminded me of me • special bond that - it's kind of hard to put into words • I felt very isolated in a lot of ways. I felt I couldn't really talk to anyone in many ways. And yet when I was with her I felt that everything was alright • she was I would say the first person – the first person who really got close to me – er, and allowed me to start to open up and let people in a bit – erm, so before that it was very lonely • I never had that kind of bond that would allow me to let other people in • I came to terms with a lot of abuse that I went through. I dealt with that – and a lot of problems I've had with my family. I've gone through a lot of stuff with that – ..., 	<p>2/6</p> <p>3/8</p> <p>5/16</p> <p>6/22</p> <p>6/22</p> <p>7/26</p> <p>7/26</p> <p>8/26</p> <p>6/21</p>
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		<p>so the last four or five years have been like a roller coaster really – and she’s been like the one constant who’s always been there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when I’ve needed some space, I’ve spent time with her – she’s er... It’s kind of hard to explain how I used to feel when I first had her – er – I felt I couldn’t really express myself to anyone – erm. I felt very isolated in a lot of ways. I felt I couldn’t really talk to anyone in many ways. And yet when I was with her I felt that everything was alright – erm. I has, it’s just been a really special bond that - it’s kind of hard to put into words • Yeah, yeah, erm. (<i>Slowly, thoughtfully</i>) I don’t think I would be where I am, erm, in term of – she got me through a lot – and she’s always been where I’ve turned to I suppose the most for support – just in terms of giving me that kind of reflection, that... [...] horses whatever you do they give you a very honest reflection of your emotions and what you are doing – which I suppose is a bit like person centred (<i>laughs</i>) really. • we hadn’t worked through all her problems, mainly because they were probably coming from me, and I haven’t worked through my own problems • I feel like I have a responsibility to them – a huge responsibility to them 	<p>6/22</p> <p>15/49</p> <p>17/55</p> <p>20/65</p>
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<p>Super-ordinate theme 3</p> <p>Infusing home and family with their presence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Friendship • Entertaining • Comedy performances • Rapport • Playfulness • Cast of many characters • Emptiness without them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I just feel like she's one of the family, she like a friend • She was the one who could always cheer me up no matter what • round her little finger so-to-speak. • it's a different kind of rapport that she... she makes me laugh – and the things she gets up to –erm – just kind of racing round • it's her humour that gets me. • Different characters – yeah • for me they are calming because of the routine, they still always need feeding and looking after, so there's always that. Erm, (<i>pause</i>), there's always something that one them will bring to me each day, erm, in terms of affection, or something that they do that can make me laugh. • I mean they are all part of the family, erm. As far as I'm concerned they are all each a member of the family and – not that they do very much around the house but (<i>laughs</i>). They er, they all have their own character and they all do their own little thing and ,.. • It would feel empty without any animals. • when I get home the cats can hear, they know the car, er, and they're waiting in the street or they'll all suddenly appear – they're waiting for me and – they know, they come home when I come home if they are not already in. 	<p>6/20</p> <p>8/28</p> <p>9/29</p> <p>9/30</p> <p>10/32</p> <p>18/57</p> <p>19/59</p> <p>19/60</p> <p>19/61</p>
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<p>Super-ordinate theme 4</p> <p>Non-human relationship is a natural, easier relationship than the human one</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm chosen • The relationship comes easily/naturally • From inside • Innate need • Warmth • Peace • Contentment • Pure • Accepting my failings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they just happened to come into my life • I think there was just something about me bonding with animals • a person's who's adopted as a child quite often will put a lot of our relationships in with animals • it was very much driven by me – something I felt a need for. (riding) • I think they offer you something unconditional • they've chosen to stay • Just kind of warmth and calmness. They bring me a real sense of peace. • What I have found over the years is that animals are the most forgiving creatures. It doesn't matter if you get something wrong – you can try again – they'll deal with it. 	<p>11/36</p> <p>12/39</p> <p>12/39</p> <p>13/39</p> <p>13/40</p> <p>13/42</p> <p>20/63</p> <p>20/65</p>
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Summary of Themes – Louise

Super-ordinate Themes	Significant focuses	Verbatim extracts	Page/section
Super-ordinate theme 1 Witness to me life and special companion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity • Constant companion • I'm her special person • There's understanding between us • Member of family • Sense of belonging • Grieving over loss • Through all difficulties and changes • Only her – through everything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • she's been with me on my travels and living in different places • she's been a witness to all the things that have happened to me since, since I, my marriage, my first marriage broke up. So she's very important in just being constant I think. • I think the constant nature of her has been important. • I just think we, she and I, have a more important bond – that she knows that I am the person who ultimately feeds her and takes her out and looks after her, erm. And although she's happy with other people – and I might be imagining this (<i>laughs</i>), I'm quite happy to admit that I might be imagining it – I do think there is a bond here. • And she knows when she's not supposed to be doing things, and she knows if I'm unhappy or – y'know, she's just kind of, I do think there's a really strong bond. • she was, again she was very much full of fun and a member of the family • and it was very hard for me because I left – I had to leave – I left the dog. And that was really difficult because my husband understood why I was leaving but I felt like I couldn't tell the dog why I was going, and I didn't see him again. • through all of that, really kind of y'know, up and down – and different jobs and different places and 	1/1 2/2 2/4 7/14 7/14 11/20 11/20 13/24

		<p>different people in my life – y’know, she’s been the thing that’s always been there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And that’s the only thing in that time that has been, that has been constant, so y’know that’s, and I kind of think about her that she and I have lived that together, even though she’s obviously not experienced lots of the things that I’ve experienced. She’s seen all of that – that’s the kind of idea of a witness – I like, I really like that kind of idea, that she’s just – nobody else has, nobody else has been there through all of that, those things, and those changes. 	13-14/26
<p>Super-ordinate theme 2</p> <p>More than simply presence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted life to suit her needs • Filled life without stressful demands • Better than human company during low period • I feel her when she’s out of sight • It’s empty when she’s not there • Importance above expectation • Anxious over anticipated loss • Surprised by degree of importance • Simple, honest relationship, yet extraordinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I just negotiated my working hours to fit around (<i>laughs</i>) looking after her. • I kind of built my life around looking after her in that – and that kind of, took me off, distracted me from other stuff that was difficult. • being on my own, I wanted to be on my own when I wasn’t working but I didn’t want to be totally on my own so she sort of, she was a nice compromise between having to engage with people socially • she’s just this little, lively presence in the house ... I feel her presence there... there’s a constant kind of sense of her there ... it’s not that life revolves around, well maybe it does (<i>laughs</i>) revolve around her, but I think her presence is very important in the house.... it’s very odd, the house feels very empty without her in it. So I think she’s got a very, a very positive presence. • I think how important she is, I mean, how important she’s become. And now she’s ten, and 	<p>4/6</p> <p>4/7</p> <p>4/7</p> <p>6-7/12</p>

		<p>hopefully she'll go on for a long time, 'cos she's very lively and healthy and a cross-breed, y'know, so she's not got any of those inherited weakness, but I know, I've been thinking, because she's getting grey and everything, erm, how am I going to manage when she's gone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So I think that, how important she is really, and how, how she does fill spaces physically but also emotionally, I think. And that has been quite surprising. • I suppose it's, it's like a, it's a much more simple and a much more honest, if you like, relationship. There's no game playing – y'know, apart from the sticks – there's no agendas with dogs – there's no betrayals – no disappointments – they are just as they are – and I really like that, 'cos I think that's, that's just, I don't have to kind of work out what's going on with Joy (<i>laughs</i>). She wants to go for a walk, she wants to go out, she wants some food – and it's basic and simple and easy and I really needed that and I still need that – it's really – y'know with my job and every - all the pressures of life, there's something easy and simple about my dog and the relationship I have with her. And that's great, I think that's great. And I do feel sorry for people who don't get that. I do think they are really missing out on something really special. 	<p>12/23</p> <p>13/23</p>
<p>Super-ordinate theme 3</p> <p>An aid to recovery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave me shelter • Allowed me to withdraw from people • Enabled me to bond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially she was a reason to get up, go out – I had to take her out for walks – (<i>tearfully</i>) sorry, it's upsetting thinking about it. • I didn't feel like interacting with people – (<i>tears</i>) 	<p>2/3</p> <p>2/4</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilising • She expected little back from me • She helped me re-build myself • Symbiotic relationship • Sheltered from social demands • Dog enabled an easy level of communication • Emotional wellbeing • Gave optimism • Widened world • Knew from experience that a dog would be positive influence on mood • Utterly trustworthy in partnership • Exactly the right qualities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She was really important in just bonding with somebody, or something, um. • I suppose it's also emotional in a sense of recognisinghow significant having her in my life at that time was for my erm, emotional stability (<i>tearful voice</i>) I guess. So it's more to do with how important she was, and how sad I was. • life-saver would be a very dramatic way of putting it – in some ways I suppose (<i>long pause, emotional</i>) – yes, she's very um – yes, she gave me some stability – looking after her, taking her out, routine, some sort of interaction that didn't expect anything of me except very basic kind of actions. • I could give her I guess as well, in terms of, y'know, (<i>sounding choked, tearful</i>) a fanciful word to use, trust that she had in me to care for her, erm, and that was nice because I was very devastated, erm. But she kind of helped me to erm, put myself together again I think. She was very much part of that process of, erm, yeah, re-building myself I suppose. • I think it would have been difficult without her because I didn't want to interact with people particularly • I didn't want to get to know people, I didn't want to socialise so I'd be able to say at work, oh I can't come out because I've got to go home and feed the dog (<i>laughs</i>). I'm sure people thought I was a bit mad, but that's fine. It just gave me an excuse not to interact with people till I really wanted to on a social level – it was really useful. 	<p>2/4</p> <p>3/5</p> <p>3/5</p> <p>3/6</p> <p>3/6</p> <p>4/6</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I could engage with other dog-walkers and I had a nice little group of people I'd meet most mornings when I took her out – we'd chat about our dogs and that all we did, we didn't go into anything else about who we were – and I found that level of engagement sufficient to kind of, at that time 	4/7
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've been very open about how important my dog is in helping my emotional well-being and my mental health at kind of key moments 	8/16
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I could have ended up being a bit bitter and twisted (<i>laughs</i>) after my marriage breakdown. But I think having her sort of stopped me being too cynical actually, in a funny way. But it kind of gave me some optimism at a time when things were crap, and that was quite important, and if maybe I hadn't had that optimism at the time, or that sort of focus of enjoyment, 'cos she was quite a cheeky puppy, then yeah, I think I might have been a lot more miserable (<i>laughs</i>) than I am now. I think she really picked me up at a time when I was pretty low. And I suppose she's made me a little bit more sociable – chatting to people who have got other dogs – and she's made me go out into the local community a lot more 	10/18
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it was hard for me to trust people, but I didn't, it wasn't hard for me to trust my dog. I just trust her, I just – she's loyal and she's cheeky and she's all those things, but she, she's there and she's not going anywhere. And she won't let me down. 	14/27
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something to hold onto that was good. 	15/30

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And it worked, yeah it worked. • I think at the time that I got her there was just this little bit of hope that things would be okay – and she brought that, by that sort of, easy-going kind of simple, uncomplicated way that dogs and animals have – and that's great. 	15/31 16/35
Super-ordinate theme 4 Enhances my life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate strategy for adding happiness • Positive qualities in relationship • No let-downs • Camaraderie • Connecting with people • Lifts spirits • Humour of dog's performance • Complex communication • Benefits outweigh difficulties • Sheer fun • Something worth sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thought that the best way to get some happiness back in my life was to buy a dog • I think dogs are very loyal and they are dependent and it's just nice to have that relationship. • wasn't any kind of deep level of interaction or any expectation, it was just a – it was nice to just talk about inconsequential things that dogs had been doing (<i>laughs</i>). And dog community are y'know, generally people that have dogs, really, I like them, y'know. I like talking about my dog, I like knowing about their dog • People will stop you and tell you the whole story about rescuing their dog and – I just like that, I like that sort of engagement, I think – and I like that now as well. And I like people liking her and giving her a fuss, and, like at the corner shop, every time we go they give her lots of treats. • I think generally she just cheers me up. • if she is being told to do something she doesn't want to, there's a whole kind of grumbling that goes on, y'know about the fact that – and if we say get off the sofa she'll go and, instead of just sitting down she'll do this whole turning around and around and around – sometimes for ages, making it, making it known I think that she's not 	1/1 2/4 5/8 5/8 6/10 8/15

		<p>happy that she's not allowed to be on the sofa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I suppose it's erm, and maybe it feel a bit silly just to kind of articulate the communication process, I don't know. But I feel blessed. • I know there are people that don't understand that but I personally think, poor them really, because I think pets can be so important to people – and if you haven't got that, if you haven't had that experience then you don't understand how significant a pet can be • And sometimes it's a pain because there are restrictions which come with having a dog ... but they are small costs compared to the benefits she's bought, I think. • she'll just go along with whatever's going on – as long as she's in the middle of it (<i>laughs</i>). • I like, y'know, it's nice that my friends like her and we can share the joy (<i>laughs at pun on name</i>). • So I've grown up with animals as very much a central part of – or dogs, I should say, not animals, dogs. So it seemed very natural then for me 	<p>9/16</p> <p>9/17</p> <p>9/17</p> <p>17/35</p> <p>11/20</p>
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Summary of Themes – Violet

Super-ordinate Themes	Significant focuses	Verbatim extracts	Page/section
Super-ordinate theme 1 Wholeness: filling the void	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sounds filling silence • Conversation happens • Wholeness comes from warm animal presence • Loneliness diminished - She's my little shadow • I am welcomed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when I first got them I realised how much I'd missed having that kind of pet in my life. • the house just felt so empty when I didn't have anything else there – and you just can't have a conversation with a degu (<i>laughs</i>). You can go home and you can talk to your cats, y'know, they'll reply, they'll sit they and they'll look at you like you're crazy – and demand food (<i>laughs</i>). • in the period I didn't have cats for, definitely the house was missing a wholeness kind of thing, erm. I don't think a house is a home without, y'know, an affectionate pet in it. • she's my little shadow (<i>laughs</i>). • When my daughter's not there I did struggle with that for a while. Y'know, going home to an empty house is just the most awful thing – it's, I can't express – y'know, just, no, no other life in the house, no other being in the house, y'know – it just feels empty. • definitely a feeling of wholeness about having them again – it's – missed having something like that in my life – yeah – it's the affection and bond, definitely. • when I used to go home and the house 	3/2 4/4 11/17 15/25 15/25 16/26

		was empty it was horrible – yeah I used to find it quite daunting and I probably didn't sleep that much.	21/44
Super-ordinate theme 2 Bond - Beyond what I can explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surpasses expectations • They know things before me • They care for me • Friendship – exceptional • I trust their instincts about people • We belong together like close family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • she formed a real attachment with me • they know if something's wrong or I'm feeling unwell – • Soon as I lay down, before I knew I was pregnant, they were both on my stomach. There was like, oh, there here again, and as they got bigger they kind of draped over the bump and – but they were looking after me and the baby • For me – yeah, they are good friends, y'know, it's ..yeah, the house wouldn't be the same without them. I couldn't ... it's definitely amazing having them be there. • I just think I should trust their judgement more (<i>laughs</i>). • I do feel particularly strong towards these two because they are my cats, they are not mine and my partner's cats, not mine and my mum and dad's cats, they're my cats and I've raised them since they were kittens – and I think, y'know the bond's stronger there. 	2/1 5/6 5/6 16/28 17/ 31-32 18/33 18/36
Super-ordinate theme 3 The relationships give me my self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing the pain • Feeling cared for • Being chosen • Ownership • Singled out for special 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've got one that's a lap cat and she's very affectionate, looks after me • she became my cat, she would only sit on me, she would only settle on me..... she wasn't really interested, wouldn't settle 	3/2 7/11

	<p>attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built self-esteem • Belonging • Being wanted • Aided recovery from breakdown • Sense of being needed • No choice but to function for them • Identity • Essential part of my life • Clearly understand the benefits to me • Therapeutic • Life-savers 	<p>with my parents, she settled with me, she was my cat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt kind of special, because I think there was a lot of, not sibling rivalry, but very much my little brother was more favoured, erm, by my parents and y'know, the cat, the cat was mine, made me happy. • They do lift my mood, they have, I think they've been part of, erm, my recovery really because I had – over the past, nearly three years – I've had a couple of breakdowns, ended up on medication and things – and it wasn't until I got the kittens last year that I actually suddenly started feeling a hell of a lot better. • if it hadn't have been for them I wouldn't have had a reason to not - to push myself to normalisation and sort myself out so they do have a massive effect on my mood • I think my recovery was a lot quicker ... it was somebody else, 'somebody' else <i>(tone of querying her expression 'somebody')</i> I had to functions for • I don't mind – people know I'm the crazy cat lady - <i>(laughs)</i> • I think I find it quite difficult to – sort of form a bond sometimes with people who are like completely anti-pets – it's like, how can you not have anything in your life? Y'know, I don't get that. • and there is just no way I could have not 	<p>7/12</p> <p>10/16</p> <p>11/17</p> <p>11/18</p> <p>14/22</p> <p>14/22</p> <p>19/36</p>
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		<p>had those cats in my life. [...] my best friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they definitely relax me when I'm tense • they've sort of enforced functioning. It used to be when my daughter went away I would just kind of withdraw and I didn't like it, but because I've a duty of care to them ...I have to function, and that's good 'cos I know withdrawing into myself isn't the best thing and they stop me doing that. • I miss my daughter terribly when she goes away – oh-ff, just, it's never good. But now I've got the kittens, the cats, that's even easier y'know definitely, definitely a lot easier. • I wouldn't have got through some of the time in the past year if it hadn't been for them. • I got from a website called xxxx.com – black tee-shirt, two little eyes, and it just says 'feral' across it. It's a – well – you can tell I'm a mad cat lady (<i>laughs</i>). 	<p>20/43</p> <p>20/43</p> <p>20-21/40</p> <p>21/44</p> <p>15/23</p> <p>5/5</p> <p>31/23</p>
<p>Super-ordinate theme 4</p> <p>They give me profound delight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual pleasure • Touch, enjoyed and needed • Tactile • Affection always there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • my current cats are beautiful, absolutely gorgeous beings. • They are like panthers, absolutely just gorgeous and sleek and beautiful. • I miss the contact, I miss the cuddling and playing and everything like that, yeah, but day-to-day basis like going off to work, I don't physically miss them, but long periods of time, yes I do. 	<p>1/1</p> <p>3/2</p> <p>10/16</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I need – if I need a hug or something – I get to the point where I'm a bit sad, I just pick up the cat, give them a stroke, give them a cuddle, y'know. If there's nobody there to hug – the cats are there. • often wake up and I'll have one on that side and one on the other side – I'm completely pinned down or they've taken up my whole quilt 	<p>20/39</p> <p>2/3</p>
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Major Themes, Sub-themes and edited encapsulations for each participant

Major Theme 1: Presence				
	Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Sub-theme Filling the spaces	She's very much always there. I wander around and there's a patter of paws. It would just be really quiet or empty.	You can converse. The house was missing a wholeness. I used to find it quite daunting and I didn't sleep that much. No other life in the house, no other being, it just feels empty. When my daughter's not there going home to an empty house is just the most awful thing no other life in the house.	There's a constant kind of sense of her there. Her presence is very important in the house, the house feels very empty without her in it. She's got a very, a very positive presence. She fills spaces physically but also emotionally.	It would feel empty without any animals. It felt like it was us together and it didn't really matter what else was going on in my life. Before knowing Amber that it was very lonely.
Sub-theme Touch, sight, sound and play	The little quirks they just made me smile. They are very good at looking cute I think I get the same reaction to cats that most people get to babies, that they do something cute and you get that warm feeling. They do a lot of purring, which I find soothing... they'll both purr and nuzzle. It's sensory - lots of nuzzling. It is a lot of fun	My current cats are beautiful, absolutely gorgeous beings. They are like panthers, gorgeous and sleek and beautiful. I miss the contact, the cuddling and playing. Often wake up and I'll have one on that side and one on the other side – I'm completely pinned down or they've taken up my whole quilt. They've got very different personalities. A lot of energy	There's a whole kind of grumbling that goes on, if we say get off the sofa - making it known I think that she's not happy that she's not allowed to be on the sofa. She'll just go along with whatever's going on – as long as she's in the middle of it.	They all have their own character and they all do their own little thing. There's always something that one them will bring to me each day, in terms of affection, or something that they do that can make me laugh. She's always had that ability to make me laugh. A different kind of rapport - she makes me laugh

Major Theme 2: The bond				
	Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Sub-theme A constant witness	They're just usually there. always had them growing up, that presence – that little presence in the house. There just always, there're always there. You're trying to shoo them off if I need to get up, it's a nightmare because as soon as I move them they are trying to get back.	She's my little shadow. If I need a hug I just pick up the cat. They've always – cats have always been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I take risks and trouble to have them in my life - landlord doesn't know about them	She's been a witness to all since my first marriage broke up. That's the only thing that has been constant, she and I have lived that together - a witness – nobody else has, nobody else has been there through all of those changes.	We have kind of stuck together through trying different things. She's been like the one constant who's always been there. She's always been where I've turned to the most for support.
Sub-theme Extraordinary companionship	I am the person they come to. We have a strong bond between the three of us. A protective bond.. They can interpret our body language –we can interpret theirs. They seem to pick up on how you are feeling. It's a physical kind of understanding. Unspoken understanding	She formed a real attachment with me. They know if something's wrong or I'm feeling unwell. Guardians. They are my cats – no-one else's. Adamant - There is just no way I could have not had those cats in my life -my best friends.	We have a more important bond than she has with others. She's a member of our family. I negotiated my working hours to fit around her. Anticipates great loss. It's a more simple honest, relationship, no game playing, no agendas with dogs, no betrayals, no disappointments	I just feel like she's one of the family, a friend. Really special bond - hard to put into words. She was the first person who really got close to me and allowed me to start to open up and let people in. it's almost like we understood each other. They are each a member of the family
Sub-theme Understanding, reciprocity and caring	A protective bond. They're responding – mine come if I whistle, respond to the voice, sound and the tone –and they become vocal.	I talk to my cats, they reply. They greet me when I come through the door. They give a cuddle, a purr or a random conversation.	She knows if I'm unhappy. The trust that she had in me to care was important. She's made me more sociable. It wasn't hard for	We help each other. I tend to want to wrap her up in cotton wool. They taught me a lot about myself and how I come across to

	If my sister has a panic attack, she'll find a cat on her knee, They have emotional intuition and sense pain and give comfort. I understand their body language	She's very affectionate, looks after me. They know if something's wrong or I'm feeling unwell. Before I knew I was pregnant but they were looking after me and the baby. I should trust their judgement more.	me to trust my dog. I just trust her, she's loyal she's there and she's not going anywhere - she won't let me down. It feels like we really communicate. I feel blessed	people and to animals. They give you a very honest reflection of your emotions and what you are doing. We work through our problems in unison. Forgiving, unconditional quality.
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Major Theme 3: Self and Enrichment				
	Anne	Violet	Louise	Charlotte
Sub-theme Healing and transforming	When I suffered depression and anxiety having them around always made me happier. Always nice feels associated with her, very peaceful. They never have a negative effect on my mood. I'm part of something bigger than me, like a little pack, a little unit. They make me a bigger presence. It's my expression of maternal instinct. People are drawn	They lift my mood. They've been part of my recovery - I've had a couple of breakdowns - it wasn't until I got the kittens that I suddenly started feeling a lot better. I wouldn't have had a reason to push myself to normalisation - they do have a massive effect on my mood. They relax me when I'm tense. Enforced functioning. I used to withdraw when my	I didn't feel like interacting with people . She was really important in just bonding again. She gave me stability –routine, interaction that didn't expect anything of me. She helped me put myself together again. She was part of that process of re-building myself. It would have been difficult without her - I didn't want to interact with people. I could engage with other	There was something in her that reminded me of me. Having some quiet time with her help ground me, re-balance myself emotionally. I felt that everything was alright. I never had that kind of bond that would allow me to let other people in. When I've needed some space, I've spent time with her. When I first had her I felt I couldn't really express myself to anyone

	to our house because of the cats.	daughter went away but because of them I have to function. I wouldn't have got through some of the time in the past year if it hadn't been for them.	dog-walkers -I found that level of engagement sufficient. She gave me some optimism. She picked me up at a low time. She brought hope that things would be okay	– she helped me. She was the one who could always cheer me up no matter what. Just kind of warmth and calmness. They bring me a real sense of peace
Sub-theme Connections and purpose	I'm part of the group - it's almost like a little pack, like a little unit. It gives me another reason, to keep going, to do that next day when you don't want to. We adopted them to look after them for the rest of their lives so we have a duty. It give a sense of purpose, someone, dependent on you.	I've raised them since they were kittens –I think, the bond's stronger. I felt special, because my little brother was more favoured by my parents the cat was mine, made me happy - gave me more belonging, sense of being needed. I wouldn't have had a reason to push myself to normalisation and sort myself - they have a massive effect on my mood. My recovery was a lot quicker - it was somebody else, I had to functions for.	Initially she was a reason to get up, go out – I had to take her out for walks. It is a very useful connection with people. Something to hold onto that was good. She's made me more sociable – chatting to people who have got other dogs – and she's made me go out into the local community more. I like that my friends like her and we can share the joy. I like talking about my dog, I like knowing about their dog	I feel like I have a huge responsibility to them. they just happened to come into my life. There was just something about me bonding with animals. Riding was very much driven by me – something I felt a need for. Cats have chosen to stay (with me)
Identity and beliefs	One cat has very much adopted me as her	When I first got them I realised how much I'd	I built my life around looking after her – it	Some guilt about keeping them to myself but now

	<p>human. They will always have a preference for me over anybody else</p> <p>I'm probably one of these people most likely to be voted crazy cat lady. My work badge has cats on it - that's my personalisation.</p> <p>I've never met anyone who doesn't like them. I have a philosophy - people tell me they don't like cats – and I say you haven't met mine yet so you can't judge that.</p> <p>I think cats generally – they make you smile – you think about something like that, and it makes you smile, then it makes your day a bit brighter.</p>	<p>missed having that kind of pet in my life. I don't think a house is a home without, an affectionate pet in it. I missed having something like that in my life - the affection and bond. I can't imagine them not being there and not looking after me. Theory - something to do with the sound levels – – the vibrations that a cat's can actually be physically healing – I do believe that makes sense. They just wouldn't entertain this guy at all, - bizarre. I talk about my cats a lot. I find it difficult to form a bond sometimes with people who are anti-pets – I don't get that. I literally wear it on my chest. I've always had a good relationship with cats. My website - you can tell I'm a mad cat lady.</p>	<p>distracted. I immediately warm to people who have a dog. I've been very open about how important my dog is in helping my emotional well-being and my mental health. I thought the best way to get some happiness back in my life was to buy a dog – it worked! Although she's happy with other people –I might be imagining this - I do think there is a bond here. I do feel sorry for people who don't get that, they are really missing out on something special. I know there are people that don't understand that but I think, poor them really,. I've grown up with dogs so it's s very natural for me</p>	<p>have interested in was equine therapy. Being adopted as a child perhaps I put a lot of our relationships in with animals. Honest reflection of emotions and what you are doing – a bit like person centred. They offer you something unconditional. What I have found over the years is that animals are the most <u>forgiving</u> creatures. It doesn't matter if you get something wrong – you can try again – they'll deal with it. For me it's about seeing it from their point of view – from the animal's point of view rather than from a human point of view</p>
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Research Journal - Extract – 23/09/2013

*Crystallising the major themes is forcing me to look again and to interpret - link
- see synergies and differences.*

*Finding exact words to encapsulate themes is strenuous and seems vital. I want
to do justice to the participants and capture their essence.*

*It's hard to move swiftly from one data set to another - they articulate so
differently - but I'm recognising them better all the time.*

*What was left over from groupings when put into Major Themes? - 'beliefs' - is
it important? Why hadn't I seen it before? Is it something to discard? Where
does it fit?*